

April 2012 Trend Briefing:

FLAWSOME

Why brands that behave more humanly, including showing their flaws, will be awesome.



FLAWSOME definition:

Consumers don't expect brands to be flawless. In fact, consumers will *embrace* brands that are FLAWSOME*: brands that are still brilliant despite having flaws; even being flawed (and being open about it) can be awesome. Brands that show some empathy, generosity, humility, flexibility, maturity, humor, and (dare we say it) some character and humanity.

Two key drivers are fueling the FLAWSOME trend:

- **HUMAN BRANDS:** Everything from disgust at business to the influence of online culture (with its honesty and immediacy), is driving consumers away from bland, boring brands in favor of brands with some personality.
- **TRANSPARENCY TRIUMPH:** Consumers are benefiting from almost total and utter transparency (and thus are finding out about flaws anyway), as a result of the torrent of readily available reviews, leaks and ratings.

* Yup, FLAWSOME is by far our most cringeworthy trend name. But we bet you'll remember it ;-)

HUMAN BRANDS

FLAWSOME sits as part of a bigger trend towards HUMAN BRANDS, something that we've touched upon in many previous Trend Briefings: [RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS](#), [BRAND BUTLERS](#), [GENERATION G](#), and so on.

So, while HUMAN BRANDS might not be a 'new' theme, four currents are now converging to make consumers more focused on brand attitude and behavior than ever before:

*"human nature dictates that people have a hard time **genuinely connecting** with, being close to, or really trusting other humans who (pretend to) have no weaknesses, **flaws**, or mistakes"*

1. Consumers' disillusionment at corporate behavior has (finally) spilled over into **outright disgust**. As a result, any brand that can show business in a new light will be (deservedly) welcomed with open arms.
 - Nearly 85% of consumers worldwide expect companies to become actively involved in promoting individual and collective wellbeing; an increase of 15% from 2010 (Source: Havas Media, November 2011).
 - Yet only 28% of people think that companies are working hard to solve the big social and environmental challenges (Source: Havas Media, November 2011).
2. Consumers are more and more aware that **personality and profit can be compatible** (think Zappos, Patagonia, Tom's, Ben & Jerry's, Michel et Augustin, Zalando and more). With every business that succeeds while remaining reasonable, helpful, fun or even somewhat 'human', consumers will become increasingly disenchanted when dealing with traditional, boring, impersonal brands.
 - Most people would not care if 70% of brands ceased to exist (Source: Havas Media, November 2011).

3. **Online culture is *the* culture**, and inflexible, bland 'corporate' façades jar with consumers who live online where communication is immediate, open and raw (also see [MATURALISM](#)). What's more, people openly broadcast and share their lives online - flaws and all - and thus brands are increasingly expected to do the same.
4. Last but not least: human nature dictates that people have a hard time **genuinely connecting** with, being close to, or really trusting other humans who (pretend to) have no weaknesses, flaws, or mistakes - don't assume brands are any different.

TRANSPARENCY TRIUMPH

Alongside this craving for personality sits a deluge of reviews, remarks, ratings, reports, leaks and so on. We discussed [TRANSPARENCY TRIUMPH](#) way back in 2009; three years later, consumers can benefit from **near-total transparency**.

And 'transparency' will continue to be one of *the* key 'big business themes': from [frictionless sharing](#) by individuals to the visualization of previously invisible data (see our [DIY HEALTH](#) trend), to the forced transparency that the Wikileaks of this world brought to governments, brands, institutions and individuals. Prepare for a world in which *everything* (attitudes, prices, quality, behavior) *will* be completely accessible and therefore potentially outed as 'flawed'.

So, with consumers likely to find out everything about your products, services and activities anyway, you have no option but to embrace if not celebrate them, flaws and all.

Two things to bear in mind:

1. Flawlessness is an illusion, and indeed a harmful one. Isolated negative reviews don't kill brands. In fact, the opposite applies: people's trust in positive reviews appearing alongside them increases. Consumers aren't stupid: they know that no products will satisfy everyone all of the time. Some stats:
 - 68% of consumers trust reviews more when they see both good and bad scores, while 30% suspect censorship or faked reviews if their aren't any negative comments or reviews (Source: Reevoo.com, January 2012).
 - Shoppers who go out of their way to read bad reviews convert 67% more than the average consumer (Source: Reevoo.com, January 2012).
2. Things *will* go wrong. While consumers have never been able to complain more vociferously, brands too can react and respond. If handled well, even flaws can be made FLAWSOME, and reputations mended if not made.
 - 76% of people who complained on Twitter received no response from the brand. But among those who were contacted, 83% liked or loved that the brand responded, and 85% were satisfied with the response (Source: Maritz Research, September 2011).

BETA BUZZ

And of course, FLAWSOME is also about companies opening up the way their customers have already opened up online. Introduce beta, not-yet-perfect products and services*, and rely on the crowds for feedback and advice.

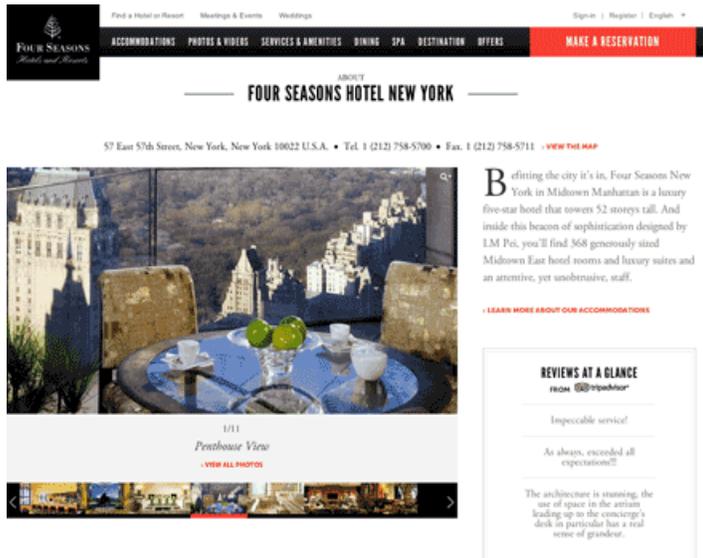
** We're not advocating launching sub-standard products, but many brands could learn lessons from the software industry and their 'beta' approach. Customers will of course often appreciate and even enjoy helping you improve.*

Examples

FEEDBACK

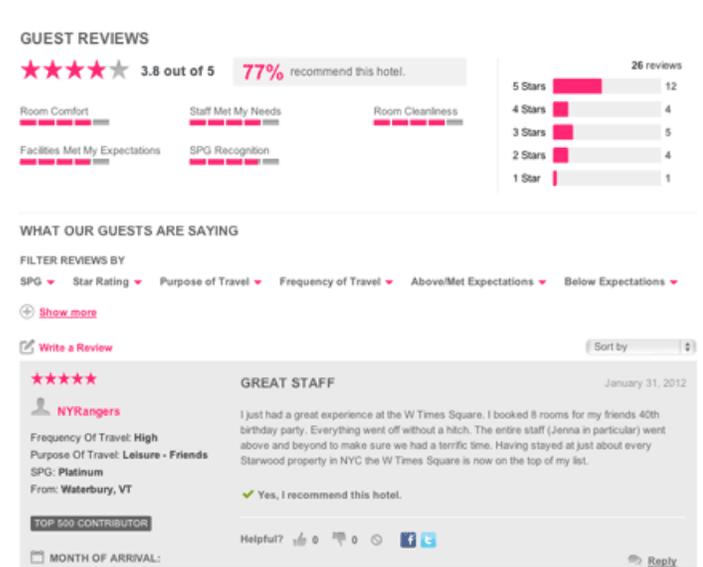
Far from fearing customer feedback, brands can celebrate it:

Four Seasons website integrates customer comments



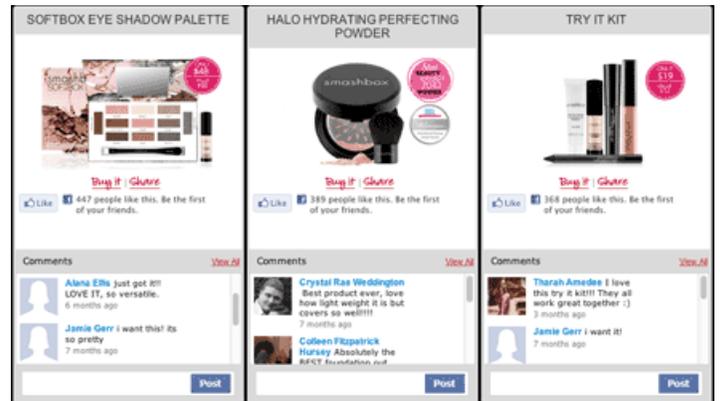
The [Four Seasons](#) luxury hotel chain overhauled its website in January 2012 to include customer reviews from TripAdvisor and comments from Facebook and Twitter. Comments are placed prominently and users can click through to external content, something that is still a rarity on luxury brand websites.

Starwood guest reviews



[Starwood Hotels](#) also started publishing customer reviews on their website in October 2011, although the reviews are collected internally rather than sourced from external sites.

Smashbox Social Shop



Beauty brand [Smashbox's Social Shop](#) shows Facebook 'Likes' and comments alongside specific products. Users can also see products that their friends have commented on or liked.

Theaters trial 'Tweet Seats'



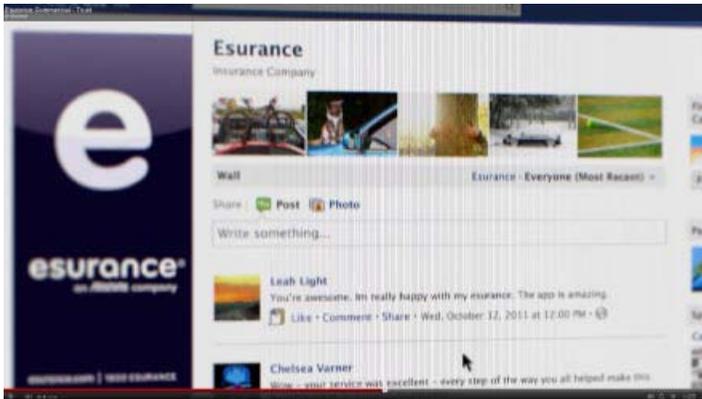
A number of theaters, including the Connecticut's Norma Terris Theater, are experimenting with reserving special seats where audience members who want to discuss the performance via social media can continue to use their mobile devices. The seats are often in the back row to avoid distracting other (non-tweeting) members of the audience (via [USA Today](#)).

Chevrolet Car Hunters



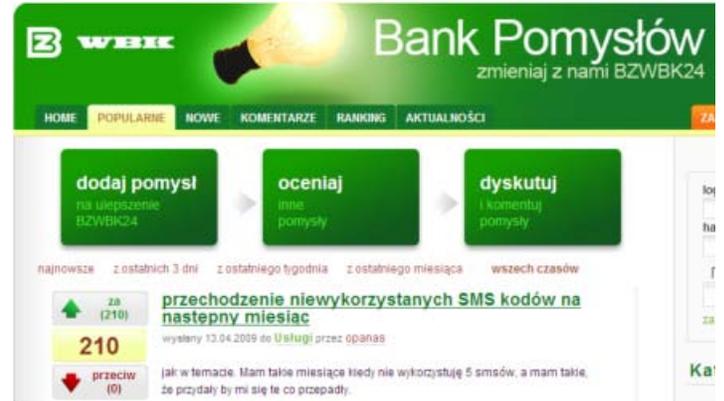
Inspired by HGTV's House Hunters, in September 2010 Chevrolet commissioned a [TV series](#) in which customers looking for a new car drove vehicles from themselves, Honda and Toyota and gave their opinions. To ensure impartiality, the brand employed the research company GfK to conduct the test drive. Chevrolet came out on top in 43 out of 70 tests.

Esurance: Insurance for the modern world



Allstate-owned Esurance released a [new campaign](#) in December 2011 asking what makes a company trustworthy? The commercial suggests that hearing what a company's customers have to say is the most reliable answer, and encourages potential customers to check out the brand's [Facebook page](#) to see what customers really think of their service.

BZ WBK's Bank of Ideas



In Poland, one of the country's main banks BZ WBK hosts the [Bank Pomysłów \('Bank of Ideas'\)](#), where customers can publicly suggest how the bank could improve its service or introduce new facilities. Ideas can be voted up or down by other customers, and the bank has implemented over 300 customer suggestions.

*“Online culture is **the** culture, and inflexible, bland ‘corporate’ façades jar with consumers who live online where communication is immediate, open and raw”*

TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT

For many brands, customer *d*islike is something to be celebrated:

Miracle Whip: We're not for everyone



Kraft Foods' [Miracle Whip](#) brand launched a campaign in February 2011 with the slogan, 'We're not for everyone. Are you Miracle Whip?'. The brand's YouTube channel featured celebrities expressing their love (or disgust) for the mayonnaise-like condiment, while viewers could vote for whether they loved or hated the sauce. By February 2012, 60,000 people had 'loved' the brand while only 4,000 had 'hated' it.

Marmite: Love it or Hate it



[Marmite](#), a savory yeast-based spread popular in the UK, has run a similar campaign for a number of years with the slogan: 'Love it or Hate it'. The brand's website asks consumers if they are lovers or haters, and depending on which is clicked, consumers are given recipes to "ruin" a sandwich (for the haters) or for sandwich "heaven" (for the lovers). The site also links to specific Facebook pages run by Marmite where the brand encourages both praise and abuse for the spread.

Alamo Drafthouse Theater: Texting not tolerated

You are reading a PDF version of "FLAWSOME": www.trendwatching.com/trends/flawsome



The Alamo Drafthouse Theater in Austin, Texas has a policy of evicting customers who text or call during screenings. After such an incident, an angry customer left a [voicemail](#), which the company posted on YouTube, where it has received 2.5 million views (Warning: contains strong language).

Lululemon: Sh*t Yogis Say



Canadian yoga equipment manufacturer Lululemon released a video in December 2011 entitled [Sh*t Yogis Say](#). Inspired by the web comedy series *Sh*t Girls Say*, the video pokes fun at middle class yoga lovers that are the brands' core customers. With only 250 'dislikes' from over 1.5 million views, it looks like the brand hit the right note.

Ruffles' AirBag infographic



In Brazil, customers were complaining on Frito-Lay's Ruffles Chips Facebook page about the ratio of chips to air in each packet of chips. Ruffles created an [infographic](#) showing the journey of the chips from the factory to stores, and explaining how the air acted as an airbag and protected the chips.

Ritte Racing: Made in China



Racing bike buyers often favor cycles that are made in France, America or Italy due to the perceived superiority. However, Ritte Racing, a Californian cycle manufacturer, tackled this head on, by writing a detailed [blog post](#) explaining the cost benefits of manufacturing in China.

ON THE MEND

It's not about being perfect, it's about being **FLAWSOME** when you mess up:

Domino's Pizza Turnaround



Image courtesy of [Russ Frushtick](#)

Possibly the quintessential **FLAWSOME** example is [Domino's Pizza Turnaround](#) campaign, started in 2009 after employees posted a negative YouTube video. In July 2011, the brand continued their transparent approach with a month-long promotional campaign in New York's Times Square, live-streaming (good and bad) customer feedback onto the digital hoarding.

FedEx: Absolutely, Positively, Unacceptable



In December 2011, a video of a FedEx deliveryman [throwing](#) a customer's monitor over their fence on YouTube received over 3,000,000 views within 48 hours. Rather than ignoring the scandal FedEx immediately responded in kind. In a blog post entitled ['Absolutely, Positively, Unacceptable'](#) and accompanying video

of their own, Fedex apologize and explain that the offending video is now being used within the company to show employees what not to do.

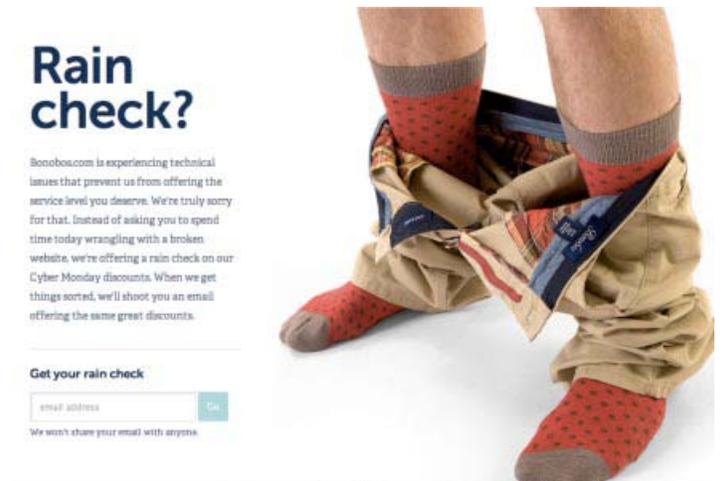
“Consumers are more and more aware that personality and profit can be compatible”

Johnson & Johnson: Personal power ballad



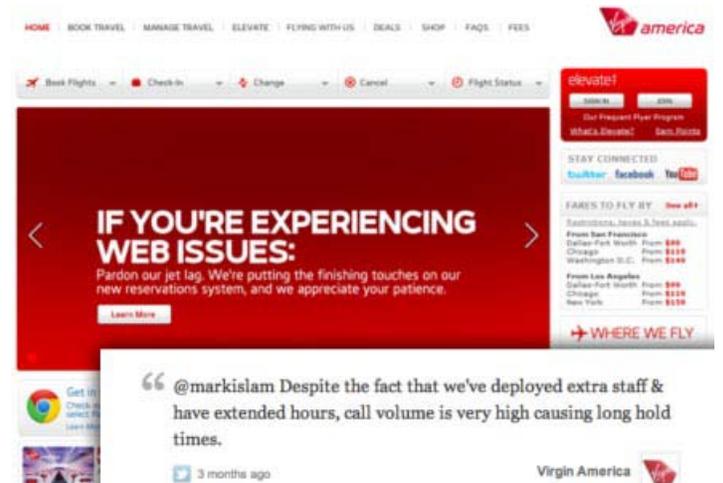
When Johnson & Johnson announced in late 2010 that their popular o.b Ultra tampon brand would be discontinued, outraged customers launched a ‘girlcott’ of J&J products and set up a [website](#) with a petition calling for the brand to reconsider. In December 2011, Johnson & Johnson reinstated the o.b Ultra brand and produced a microsite where viewers could fill in their names and receive a personalized power ballad [apology video](#) and a coupon for the tampons.

Bonobos’ epic Cyber Monday fail



Bonobos, the online male fashion retailer, experienced significant difficulties in processing sales during their Cyber Monday promotions, resulting in some customers being charged without their order being recorded. As a result, the retailer closed the site (during the busiest shopping week of the year), and promised customers that they would rerun the same promotions when the issues were resolved. After the event, a team member posted a [detailed account](#) of the experience on the Q&A site Quora.

Virgin America: Tweet by Tweet



When Virgin America upgraded their [reservation system](#) in November 2011, a number of passengers experienced difficulties and complained via Twitter and Facebook. Rather than delete the negative comments, or reply with a generic apology, Virgin America replied to each and every customer about the particular problem that they had encountered, sending over 12,000 direct messages in the weeks after the upgrade.

Red Cross – drunk tweet inspires blood and money donations



Ryan found two more 4 bottle packs of Dogfish Head's Midas Touch beer.... when we drink we do it right #gettngslizzerd

HootSuite - 2/15/11

We've deleted the rogue tweet but rest assured the Red Cross is sober and we've confiscated the keys.

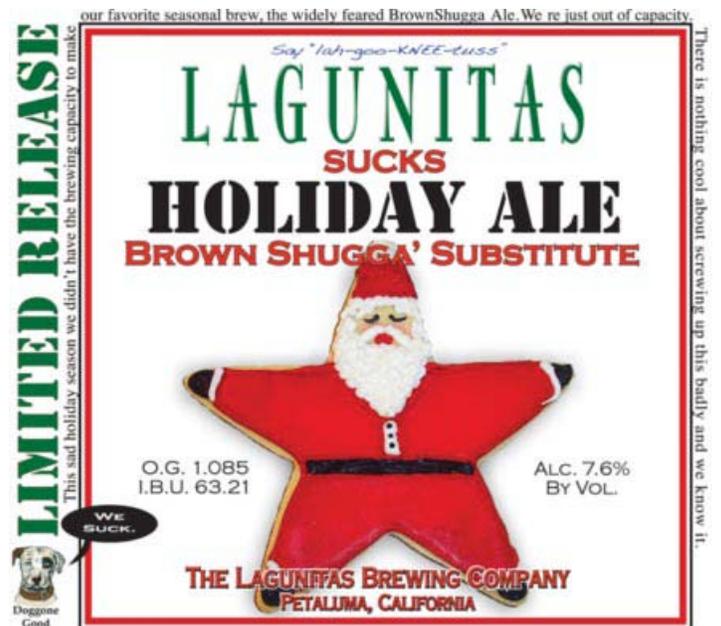
about 17 hours ago via UberTwitter

Retweeted by 300 people



When a Red Cross employee accidentally tweeted that they were planning to get drunk (with the hashtag #gettngslizzerd) from the Red Cross Twitter account and not their personal account. Rather than try and hide, the Red Cross [tweeted](#) "We've deleted the rogue tweet but rest assured the Red Cross is sober", and later admitted on their blog, "While we're a 130-year-old humanitarian organization, we're also made up of human beings." Indeed, the organization's Twitter followers were overwhelmingly positively and some even pledged donations while using the #gettngslizzerd hashtag to show their support.

Lagunitas Brewery: We Suck



In November 2011, [Lagunitas](#), a craft brewery from Northern California weren't able to produce their popular Brown Shugga seasonal ale. Instead, it released a substitute called Lagunitas Sucks Holiday Ale: Brown Shugga Substitute, with an apology: "There is no joy in our hearts and the best we can hope for is a quick and merciful end. F*@& us. This totally blows. Whatever. We freaking munch mouldy donkey butt and we just want it all to be over."

Lynx video apology after risqué ad ban



Unilever's UK body spray brand Lynx (Axe in the rest of the world) was forced to remove a series of risqué online ads following a number of complaints. In response, the brand released a [follow-up video](#) with Lucy Pinder, the model in the original series, glumly handing back the props used.

Chipotle: No bacon please

- sethporges** Seth Porges
Just spoke to head of Chipotle. Said I got them to change menus to say Pinto has bacon! Awesome & nimble response! Thanks @chipotlemedia
29 Jul
- sethporges** Seth Porges
Razor quick response from @chipotlemedia, whose exec called to discuss fixes to Pinto/Bacon issue. Will call back ASAP. Thanks guys!
29 Jul
- sethporges** Seth Porges
Was shocked to discover Chipotle puts bacon in their pinto beans. Why is it not posted on menu? cc: @ChipotleMedia
29 Jul
- sethporges** Seth Porges
After more than decade of ordering Chipotle pinto beans, I was told they have bacon. As non-pork eater, I feel ill. cc: @ChipotleMedia
29 Jul

In July 2011, when a customer found out that the Chipotle Pinto beans, which he had been ordering for years, had been cooked with pork, he took to Twitter to air his [grievances](#). That day he received a personal phone call from the CEO of the restaurant apologising and promising that going forward, all Chipotle restaurants would include this information on the menu. Chipotle's quick response, apology (from the CEO!), and active solution turned a bad situation into a [positive one](#).

Vodacom CEO pitches in on Twitter

- marknelza** Mark Nel
@Vodacom I expect you will credit all your clients with one day of line rental since you did not provide them with a service. @uyspj
1 Jul
- In reply to @marknelza 1
- @uyspj** Pieter Uys
@marknel1. Hi Mark. I am not ignoring you. Working on making you smile again :-)
1 Jul via Twitter for BlackBerry®

In July 2011, when South African telecommunications operator Vodacom's network failed, [CEO Pieter Uys](#) took to Twitter to address critics personally, and continued tweeting until after 11pm when the problem was fixed.

Innocent Drinks: Wrong voucher



Image courtesy of [CopyBot](#)

In April 2011, Innocent Drinks, a UK based smoothie manufacturer, sent out an Easter card with a coupon attached. However the barcode was incorrect, and the coupon could not be redeemed. In response, the brand sent out an [email](#) apologizing to all recipients, saying that they would replace the coupon with one that worked. They finished the email suggesting that customers could “keep [the old voucher] as a memento of our stupidity.”

Mailchimp: We'll make it up to you

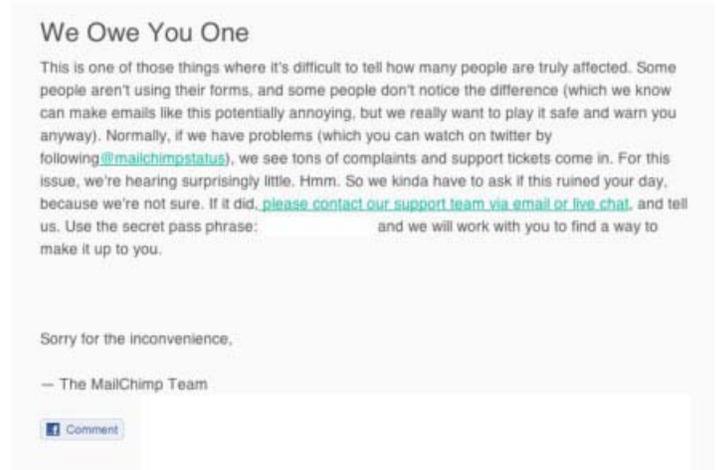


Image courtesy of [Pixsym](#)

In July 2011, [MailChimp](#), an email marketing provider, experienced an issue with some customers' signup forms. Unable to discover exactly which customers were affected (or who had even noticed the error), MailChimp sent out an email to the anyone who they suspected might have been affected inviting them to contact the support desk and promising to “work with you to find a way to make it up to you”. The brand linked to their Facebook page in the email so that customers could comment publicly. The result? Overwhelmingly positive feedback.

FLOPS

Some examples of what not to do ;-)

Chrysler's Motor City jibe



In March 2011, the author of the ChryslerAutos Twitter account inadvertently tweeted "I find it ironic that Detroit is known as the #motorcity and yet no one here knows how to f*cking drive". Chrysler's reaction was to delete the tweet and [claim](#) that their account had been compromised. The company later announced on their [blog](#) that the tweet had come from an employee of their social media agency, "who has since been terminated". The brand was criticized for its attempted cover-up, corporate inflexibility, lack of understanding and inability to make light of the situation.

Boners BBQ attacks customers



Of course, social media transparency works both ways. Something which [Boners BBQ](#) learned after posting a picture on their Facebook and Twitter accounts of a customer who they claimed left no tip. The attack was attributed by many to the fact that a 'Stephanie S.' had left a negative Yelp review the day before. Note: this is most definitely not FLAWSOME behavior ;-)

Gaopeng & the case of fake Tissot watches

【商品】【全国包邮】原装正品，支持专柜验货！仅690元！尊享原价3500元
TISSOT/天梭经典运动腕表PRC200，另有库图系列6针石英男表，多种颜色搭
配可选！源自1853年，精密计时工艺与经典简约风格完美结合，“腕”若新生，
非凡“表”现！

¥690 卖光啦

原价:¥3,600 节省:¥2,810

团购结束时间：
- - -
小时 分 秒

已有 405 人购买
团购已结束，下次早点来



推荐给朋友：
推荐给QQ好友

In October 2011, Gaopeng, the Chinese joint venture between Groupon and Tencent, ran a deal on Tissot watches. However, after the deal was complete, many buyers complained that the watches were counterfeit, later confirmed by Tissot. It took until November for Gaopeng to publicly admit that the watches were indeed fakes and [apologize](#), by which time the brand had been heavily publicly criticized via social media.

Food bloggers sued by restaurants



[Best Burger](#) in Oman threatened to sue a blogger for publishing a [mildly negative review](#). This follows a similar case brought by [Benihana](#) in Kuwait. In both instances, popular opinion was wildly behind the bloggers, and search results for the businesses quickly turn up stories about the cases. Again not FLAWSOME ;-)

Opportunities



It is always important to move with the zeitgeist, but in the case of FLAWSOME, and HUMAN BRANDS at large, it's **essential**. FLAWSOME is ultimately about having a mindset that consumers can relate to. A mindset that is open, honest, trusted and possibly even respected.

Feel FLAWSOME is too big a topic to take on? Then while true FLAWSOMENESS will never *just* be about a single moment or initiative, or heaven forbid, about inventing a few 'flaws-that-aren't-really-flaws' in an attempt to 'connect' with consumers in an 'honest' way, there are of course always places to start. Just remember to follow through, because without the awesomeness, you're just flawed ;-)

Consider:

- Embrace customer feedback. And not just by enabling product reviews (so 2007 ;-), but have the confidence to publish unadulterated feedback, and allow users to easily see the original source. They'll look anyway.
- With some review sites now being de facto industry bibles (think TripAdvisor and travel, or Yelp and restaurants), expect brands to incorporate reviews directly from third party sites into their own, thus avoiding any hints of impropriety or massaging. And with people continuously venting on social networks, watch for tools that allow users to see any comment relating to a product or service, however or wherever it's uttered. Because *not* bringing them this information is just inconvenient (and thus not very human).
- Build a culture of openness. You can never really plan for a crisis, but you should be able to trust your employees to take the initiative and speak openly if one hits. Don't let your legal department near your apology, most lawyers aren't FLAWSOME.

In the meantime, we'll be hard at work on our next Trend Briefing, flaws and all. Make sure you're [subscribed!](#)