

**#1** Is there such a thing as negative publicity?

**#2** What are some examples of negative publicity?

**#3** Can negative publicity be a good thing?

**#4** Is any publicity good publicity?

There is the old saying, “There is no such thing as bad publicity.” Any publicity, even bad, puts a brand name out into the public consciousness. Publicity is a type of viral marketing, that gets ideas out into the community and associates a brand with them. There is such a thing as negative publicity, publicity that offends our personal ethics or creates other bad associations with a product, but the side effect is that all publicity puts the brand at the tip of everyone’s tongue at the Monday-morning water-cooler gossip.

Negative publicity includes things that offend our health, environmental, and social concerns. The mortgage company Bernie Mac suffered bad publicity when racist remarks were found written on a bathroom stall. Exxon Mobil suffered bad publicity when the oil tanker Valdez caused an ecological disaster in Alaska. Certain New York fast food chains are suffering bad publicity from videos of rat infestations in their dining areas.

Despite public outrage over OJ Simpson’s book where he details how he would have murdered his wife if he had done it, the media explosion over the controversy pushed the book to number-one on Amazon’s list of pre-orders. While the controversy did finally push Fox to pull the book from publication, if it had gone to print, it would have been a number-one bestseller. Similarly, the Ayatollah’s condemnation of Salman Rushdie’s “The Satanic Verses” may have prompted bans on the book in the Middle East, the free press the bounty on Rushdie’s head generated made the book a runaway success in the West. PETA has made controversial publicity part of their marketing strategy. Rather than pay to put their advertisements out, they make their advertisements so outrageous the news media can’t resist covering them, and thus reproduce them for broader audiences.

Obviously, from the example the book gives of Tyco’s stock dropping to half its value upon the news of it being under investigation, not all publicity is good publicity. A much worse example that I can think of, is when someone tampered with bottles of aspirin, causing several poisonings, or the more recent bacteria outbreaks in spinach, Taco Bell onions, and peanut butter. It’s hard to see how having your product associated with a potentially fatal bacterial infection can be spun as a good thing; although, in the case of the aspirin, I remember the company did make a public display of instituting tamper-proof caps. Such overt damage-control might turn the tide of public perceptions.

Wow. Paris Hilton is a great example. The “Celebutant” doesn’t have any acting, singing, or modeling talent, but has become a brand name simply for her media-grabbing behavior. I had never heard of her until the media began covering the sex-video of her that had surfaced on the Internet. One would think this was bad publicity for her, but like gangster-rap stars, she takes pride in the controversy she generates in the news.