



#1800FlowersFail taught the floral and gourmet gift retailer one thing: the power of negative word-of-mouth matters

3/19/2015

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When you order a high-priced floral arrangement for your loved one on Valentine's Day, you expect the delivered product to appear as beautiful as the image from the website. However, 1-800-Flowers outraged its customers from around the United States as arrangements were delivered late with half-dead flowers and crushed chocolates this February 14th. The unfortunate negative experiences for customers catapulted 1-800-Flowers into the spotlight as [#1800FlowersFail](#) became a trending topic across social media platforms. While this sort of customer disappointment is far from the norm for its deliveries, customers were only focusing on the negative experiences this holiday.

According to the [National Retail Federation](#), approximately 120 million Americans spend an estimated \$2.1 billion on flowers every Valentine's Day. There are many outlets through which someone can purchase floral gifting arrangements, and 1-800-Flowers has grown to become one of the largest flower

delivery services. This company prides itself on providing the most beautiful and unforgettable gifts for loved ones on this romantic holiday.

"1-800-FLOWERS.COM is all about Delivering Smiles for our customers. To achieve this goal we strive to be the leading provider of thoughtful gifts, helping our customers express themselves perfectly and connect with the important people in their lives."

What customers received at their doorsteps on February 14th was truly unforgettable, but not in the way that the brand had hoped.

The product delivered to customers contradicted the very core values that built the 1-800-Flowers empire. Customers expressed their [negative reactions](#) across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and these posts went viral proving the strength and power of online negative word-of-mouth. This floral arrangement delivery company continuously impresses customers and brings joy into people's lives every day of the year. However, the negative word-of-mouth on this one holiday made customers forget these core values when they spoke to their networks online. When a similar incident first unfolded in 2014, shares of 1-800-Flowers fell up to 9% throughout the first trading day following Valentine's Day.

Word-of-mouth is one of the primary influencers of purchase behavior. Positive online word-of-mouth can increase the success of your brand, yet negative online word-of-mouth can destroy brand reputation. With the evolving power and reach of social media, word-of-mouth marketing has become one of the most important initiatives for a brand.

At [Medill IMC's Spiegel Digital and Database Research Center](#), we analyzed how [negative posts](#) in a social media environment impact corresponding purchase behavior. Based on the unique dataset provided by Air Miles, a

Canadian coalition loyalty program, we determined that viewing negative word-of-mouth decreased future spending. Customers who are active on any social media platform are prone to seeing their network express their positive or negative opinions about a brand. These opinions resonate with customers and impact their decision on whether to buy and how much to buy.

It is easily observed that the Valentine's Day disaster for 1-800-Flowers angered many customers across the U.S., but they have an opportunity to mitigate the damage. 1-800-Flowers needs to take advantage of the situation by listening to its customers and generating actionable insights to use as a learning tool for future high-traffic holidays. Initially the brand released a statement apologizing to its customers and showing their sincerity in handling the issue, which was a positive first step.

"To Our Valued Customers: We are truly sorry if you encountered any issues with your Valentine's order. We've delivered hundreds of thousands of smiles this Valentine's, and if yours wasn't one of them, we apologize. We know the importance of making someone smile, especially for this holiday, and we will do everything we can to make it right."

Here at the Spiegel Research Center we suggest **3 additional quick responses** for 1-800-Flowers to turn their negative word-of-mouth into a positive outcome.

(1) Solve the issues with specific individuals offline, but address the situation publicly.

In order to portray a sincere and genuine apology, speak to specific customers with complaints outside of social media platforms. Listen to the customer's experience and learn from them. This problem-solving tactic gives customer service representatives an opportunity to see where the process failed. Customers are more willing to remain loyal to a brand if they believe that the brand has

their best interest.

(2) Create an opportunity for NWOM social posters to re-experience the value of your brand.

An apology does not solve the issue of having half-dead flowers delivered to a loved one. Give customers an opportunity to experience your brand again by redelivering the floral arrangement. Many customers will complain and ask for a refund, but simply refunding the purchase does not give those customers the chance to re-evaluate their opinion of the brand.

(3) Maintain an open discussion with customers

Social media platforms can be used as a tool to openly communicate and involve the brand into discussions with its customers. Intervene directly in their conversations to show that the brand cares about their opinions. This negative word-of-mouth discussion is an opportunity for brands to show that they are seriously taking into account the complaints spreading online.

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