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Preparing for the Perils of Brand Mentions

Not all brand mentions are fact. Indeed, some are pure fiction.

In a recent episode of AMC's *Mad Men*, the Jaguar brand was depicted in a less-than-optimal light, involving immoral fictional Jaguar executives and implying that there were questions about the reliability of the product. Executives at any major brand are always excited when they receive news that they will be featured on a major television show, but in this case, Jaguar execs had no forewarning about the televised appearance of their brand, let alone what was going to be said about their company or how it was going to be used.

Jaguar execs can take solace in the fact that it was a fictional story. Therefore, they did not have control and even had some deniability once they found out that the episode was not portraying their company in the best light. What is a brand to do when this kind of controversy hits?

I was once confronted with this question when someone used the name of our brand in a rap song, which hit the top of the charts and received millions of downloads. Although it was popular, the song contained vulgar and derogatory words. On one hand, we were proud that the rap artists used our brand as an iconic symbol in the song, but at the same time, who wants to be associated with a word that is so derogatory and negative that it offends not only our customer base, but also our own morals and sense of who we are as a company?

How do marketers prepare themselves for the questions raised in these situations? What is your value system and what moral compass do you use in making your decisions? I was pleased to see Jaguar's response to the *Mad Men* brand inclusion, with the company rep stating that he was grateful that the brand was used in the episode and remained confident that the public would recognize that *Mad Men* is a fictional show. Similarly, I also liked the response from our team to the rap song inclusion: Some wanted to promote it, while others wanted to run from it. In the end, we decided we would always recognize the use of our brand name as iconic, yet we would neither condemn nor endorse the use of our name in a pop phenomenon. That way, we are able to take a stand and preserve our integrity as a company.

It is important for marketers to think ahead and not only raise the questions about these kinds of situations, but also think about their brand language. As marketers, we spend a lot of time thinking about the

way that our companies and brands look and feel, but also we really need to sit down and think about the essence of who we are and what we want to represent. That will filter into everything that we do, in terms of our relationships with vendors, our customers and, most importantly, the promises that we deliver to our customers.

This process should not be led by just CMOs. As the leaders of the business, CEOs have to take a very active role in deciding about the essence of the brand: where it

needs to go, how it is represented, and how executives' professional—and personal—decisions may have an impact. **m**

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Jeffrey Hayzlett will be presenting at the 10th-annual Brand ManageCamp marketing conference, an AMA partner event, in Las Vegas on Oct. 17-18, 2012. For more information, visit MarketingPower.com/events.



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