A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT DURING A PUBLIC RELATIONS CRISIS

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MELISSA WESS

ADVISER: MARK MASSÉ

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On September 30, 2008, McNeil Consumer Healthcare (a division of Johnson & Johnson) launched an ad campaign marketing one of its products, a painkiller called Motrin. The campaign, “We Feel Your Pain,” featured ads available online and in magazines targeting mothers. The ads focused on mothers who practice “babywearing” (carrying a baby on one’s body via infant carrier, sling, etc.) and explained that while this technique seems to be the latest trend among mothers to promote a bond between the mother and her baby, the practice can be painful and may cause backaches (prompting the use of their pain reliever).

Blogging mothers took offense to the campaign’s implication that slings are worn as fashion statements and created a movement on Twitter and YouTube criticizing the ad, causing the company to halt the campaign (Learmonth 2008).

National news media outlets covered the bloggers’ reaction to the ad, and industry insiders analyzed McNeil
Consumer Healthcare’s response. This public relations crisis has since become the subject of public relations case studies and scholarly research.

The following review of literature uses Ledingham’s (2003) Relationship Management Theory as a grounding foundation to illustrate the value and necessity of fostering communication between an organization and its key publics, specifically during an organizational crisis. Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model of communication (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995) is discussed as a means to demonstrate an ideal that an organization should aspire to in order to effectively manage its relationships. In addition, the idea of public relations as a management function is explained in order to emphasize the role an organization’s leaders play in the communication process during a crisis. Finally, the characteristics of a successful organization-public relationship are defined using this theory (Ledingham and Bruning 1998).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Two-Way Symmetrical Communication

In Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig’s (1995) Manager’s Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management, Dozier et al. report on the findings of Grunig’s Excellence Study. The Excellence Study has been described as the most comprehensive study undertaken in the communications profession. The fifteen-year best practices research sought to identify the characteristics of an excellent communication operation. It was also meant to determine how successful communication management and public relations techniques make an organization more effective (1995).

Through the Excellence Study, Grunig identified the two-way symmetrical model of communication as a means of managing conflicts and promoting reciprocated understanding with key publics, promoting a “win-win,” or mutually beneficial, solution. Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model of
communication has been an influential part of the development of the public relations management practices (1995).

Grunig’s model holds that “practitioners use research and dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both their organizations and publics” (Grunig in Heath 2001, 12). According to this model, “communicators act as eyes and ears of organizations, spanning organizational boundaries with one foot firmly planted inside their organizations and the other outside” (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig 1995, 39).

Research conducted on the two-way model confirms that it “describe[s] the practice of public relations in many cultures and political systems” (Grunig in Heath 2001, 12). It is compatible in corporate settings and describes the experience of many organizations (2001). In addition, it has been beneficial as a teaching tool in universities in distinguishing between old forms of public relations practices and newer advanced forms, and has become “a useful research tool for analyzing public relations practice in numerous settings and for explaining why public relations is practiced in these different ways” (12).
Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) explain the effectiveness of practicing two-way symmetrical communications in an organization:

The two-way symmetrical model... requires the sophisticated use of knowledge and understanding of publics to counsel senior management and execute communication programs. However, such two-way communication seeks to manage conflict and promote mutual understanding with key publics. Under this model, communicators seek to negotiate solutions to conflicts between their organizations and key publics. To use an overworked phrase properly, communicators practicing the two-way symmetrical model seek ‘win-win’ solutions to conflicts with publics. Communicators play a somewhat paradoxical role as advocates of the organization’s interests in negotiations with key publics but advocates of the publics’ interests in discussions with the organization’s strategic planners and decision makers. (13)

Dozier et al. explain that there are three spheres that represent the essence of excellence in communication. At the core of the sphere is the knowledge base of the communication department. The middle sphere is a set of shared expectations about communication that creates linkages between the communication department and top communicators and senior managers in the organization. These two spheres are embedded into a larger sphere of organizational culture based on teamwork and broad-based decision-making. The Three Spheres of Communication
Excellence figure can be located in Appendix One of this paper (10).

Public Relations as a Management Function

Results from the research conducted in Grunig’s Excellence Study indicate that “the expertise to play the manager role is closely tied to expertise in engaging in two-way practices” (23). From this, it is inferred that “manager role knowledge is necessary but not sufficient [in and of] itself to establish excellent communication programs” (23). Dozier et al. recognize and explain the practice of communications/public relations as a management function.

The authors identify, through the Excellence Study, two abilities strategic communicators must encompass. These consist of the ability to manage the organization’s response to issues and the ability to develop goals and objectives for the department. “Both items involve the strategic management of relationships with publics” (27). Moreover, “the overall strategic management of organizations is inseparable from strategic management of relationships, traditionally the responsibility of the public relations or communication department” (28). This
makes it necessary for a communicator to possess “the expertise to identify the desired relationships an organization seeks to build and maintain with key stakeholders or publics” (28).

How an organization reacts to issues affects relationships. “By managing responses to issues strategically, desired relationships can be built or maintained with key stakeholders” (28). Conversely, if the response is managed poorly, desired relationships with key publics can be threatened.

The Need to Define “Relationship” in Public Relations Practice

Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) found a lack of consensus on an accepted definition of the term relationship in the public relations field. Broom et al. note that not only does the “absence of a fully explicated conceptual definition of organization-public relationships [limit] theory building in public relationships,” but it “precludes measurement of organization-public relationships and forces both scholars and practitioners alike to measure one part or another and make potentially invalid inferences about the relationships” (96).
While suggesting further extensive research, Broom et al. have advanced the pioneering model for organization-public relationships, with several tentative conclusions, among them most notably:

1. The formation of relationships occurs when parties have perceptions and expectations of each other, when one or both parties need resources from the other, when one or both parties perceive mutual threats from an uncertain environment, and when there is either a legal or voluntary necessity to associate.

2. Relationships are the dynamic results of the exchanges and reciprocity that manifest themselves as the relationships develop and evolve, but they can be described at a given point in time.

3. Relationships may lead to increased dependency, loss of autonomy, goal achievement, and structured interdependence in the form of routine and institutionalized behavior.

4. Relationship formation and maintenance represents a process of mutual adaptation and contingent response. (95)

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) suggest that “when public relations is viewed as relationship management, then public relations programs can be designed around relationship goals, with communication strategies employed to support the achievement of those goals” (62). Because these programs are evaluated in terms of relationship goals, “the central focus of public relations research should be on relationships” (62).
Ledingham and Bruning define an organization-public relationship as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity,” (62). In addition, they describe what an ideal organization-public relationship should resemble: “The state that exists between an organization and its key publics that provides economic, social, political, and/or cultural benefits to all parties involved, and is characterized by mutual positive regard” (62).

Through their research, Ledingham and Bruning identify that successful organization-public relationships are initiated, developed, and maintained through trust, commitment, involvement, investment, and openness. As a result of their findings, they developed a two-step process in which they suggest organizations must “(1) focus on the relationships with their key publics, and (2) communicate involvement of those activities/programs that build the organization-public relationship to members of their key publics” (62).

Ledingham (2000) takes this research a step further, and in an effort to explain the process of developing and
maintaining positive, mutually beneficial interaction between an organization and its key publics, adapted an interpersonal relationship model in which to apply to organization-public strategies:

The Coming Together of an Organization-Public Relationship

**Phase 1: The Introductory Phase** - In this phase, organizational representatives and members of a key public follow a sort of “script.” Non-threatening, factual information is exchanged, and each begins to “get to know” the other. The imperative is to drive the relationship to the next phase.

**Phase 2: The Exploration Phase** - Here, roles and expectations are explored, with each entity trying to see if there is a mutually-beneficial basis for a continuing relationship. Many relationships never progress beyond this phase.

**Phase 3: The Escalating Phase** - In this phase, both the organization and members of the public gain confidence that they understand each other’s positions and needs. When those needs are consonant, the relationship progresses.

**Phase 4: The Assimilating Phase** - At this point, there is a good deal of continuing agreement on political, social, and economic issues. The positions taken by the organization are supported by public members and the agreement is reflected in favorable views of the organization. The organization and public members often see their values as intertwined. The organization is recognized as being open and forthright with its publics.

**Phase 5: The Fidelity Phase** - Here, there is public expression of loyalty to the organization. The organization, on the other hand, is seen as committed to the mutual interests of the public and is involved in activities supported by its publics. Public members are predisposed to favorably interpret information
regarding the organization, its issue positions and its other activities. This period may last for weeks, months or even years if mutual trust, openness and commitment are perceived as operating. (44)

The Coming Apart of an Organization-Public Relationship

Phase 1: The Contrasting Phase - In the first phase of the eventual destruction of the organization-public relationship, the participants find themselves beginning to focus on the differences between the organization and its publics more often than on agreement. It is critical to explore the cause of this decline as soon as it is recognized in order to move quickly to save the relationship.

Phase 2: The Spiraling Phase - The frequency and quality of communication between the organization and its publics declines, and communication that does carry on is often dishonest or not completely open. All those involved are less willing to invest time, money or effort in keeping the relationship going.

Phase 3: The Idling Phase - As it suggests, the relationship is “in neutral.” While not damaged beyond repair, it nonetheless has lost much of its earlier energy. Little effort is seen to address problems, with the feeling that “it just isn’t worth it.”

Phase 4: The Evading Phase - Both the organization and the public avoid communication. Calls to the organization go unanswered. The views of key publics are not solicited. Each tends to devalue the positions of the other.

Phase 5: The Discontinuance Phase - The organization and its key public have simply decided to write each other off. When communication takes place, it often is stilted and uncomfortable. Each entity tends to block access from the other and each is already actively pursuing relationships with other organizations or key publics. (45)
Ledingham suggests that knowing these ten phases can help an organization to recognize and then manage shared connections in an effort to provide benefit for both the organization and its key publics. He creates a five-step process, a continuing relationship-building program, to maintain a healthy, reciprocated association:

Managing Organization-Public Relationships

Step 1: Identify your key publics - Make an initial list of all key publics for your organization. Pass the list along to other departments and get their input. Knowing your key publics is the first step in managing your relationships with them effectively.

Step 2: Determine the state of the relationship - Determine what the state of the relationship is at this time. Call a meeting of key contact personnel and openly and honestly assess the relationship, based on the “Coming Together - Coming Apart” diagram.

Step 3: Find out how your publics view the relationship - Find out how your key publics view the relationship. This may require the use of an objective, outside observer working with your internal experts. In business-to-business relationships, for example, managers are usually more candid about their perceptions with an objective third party than they would be with a member of your organization.

Step 4: Develop strategies to manage relationships - Once you determine the state of the relationship - based on internal and external information gathering – form Relationship Improvement Teams (RITS) to develop both behavioral and communication strategies for maintaining strong relationships and moving weak ones to the desired state. At this point, also develop plans for auditing your organization’s relationship on an on-going basis to determine the effectiveness of your strategies.
Step 5: Communicate your behaviors to key publics – Communicate the results of your efforts throughout the organization and with key publics. (46)

In addition to practicing the five-step process, investing time is beneficial in maintaining an organization-public relationship. Results from Ledingham, Bruning, and Wilson’s study (1999) indicate length of time as a significant indicator of relationship dimensions and “serves as [a gauge] of behavioral predispositions toward the organization” (167). They suggest “that building relationships requires a long-term organizational commitment” (167). Ledingham et al. recommend that mutually beneficial relationships with key publics be initiated as early as possible and that interactions with key publics be developed continuously “through programs centered around operationalized relationship dimensions” (167).

What is Relationship Management Theory?

Ledingham (2003) defines relationship management as “public relations [balancing] the interests of organizations and publics through the management of organization-public relationships” (181). Recognizing the lack of a defined theoretical concept of the term
relationship for theory building, he offers, through extensive research of scholarly literature, the following definition for the theory of relationship management:

Effectively managing organizational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics. (190)

In developing this definition of Relationship Management Theory, Ledingham offers criteria set forth by Littlejohn (1995) in support of his own creation of the theory. According to Littlejohn, these eight functions must be met in order to classify a perspective as a theory:

1. The theory serves as an organizing concept for the study of public relationships and the knowledge generated from that study.
2. It focuses on the core of the domain - relationships - and answers the question: "What will I look at?"
3. It helps clarify what is observed and what public relations is about.
4. It specifies the concepts of the domain and the interaction of those concepts.
5. It lends itself to observation by [indicating] how to observe the organization-public relationship process through operational definitions and models of the phenomenon.
6. It sets the direction for future research by identifying concepts and examining the relationship between them.
7. It lends itself to communicative efforts through the presentation or publication of scholarly work.
8. The theory not only is descriptive, but also normative in that it sets requirements for performance in terms of expectation fulfillment, and mutuality of understanding and benefit. (Ledingham 2003, 190-191)

Ledingham expounds on Relationship Management Theory, identifying its foundation as being the organizations and publics, the phenomenon as being the mutual understanding and benefit, and the elements of the condition that produce an instance of phenomenon as being effective management, common interests, and shared goals (191).

"The theory also explains that mutual benefit occurs when organization-public relationships are effectively managed, and describes how a symmetrical relationship emerges," which is through "management focused, over time, on common interests and shared goals" (191). Through Ledingham’s theory, the measurable outcomes are “the mutual benefit for interacting organizations and publics” (191).

Being that his theory of relationship management is compatible with many other theories relating to public relations, it builds on existing communication models and specifies that in order to build toward symmetry, it is necessary to “[manage] organizational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals” (192). Ledingham states “identifying, typing, and categorizing publics,
certainly, should be an integral part of that process” (192).

In recent years, much research has been conducted demonstrating how the relationship between an organization and its key publics influences consumer perceptions of satisfaction (Bruning and Ledingham 1998). In addition, research also suggests that “relationship outcomes lead to [favorable] representations of an organization and positive evaluations of performance of the organization” (Yang and Grunig 2005, 305). Bruning, Castle, and Schrepfer (2004) use the tenets set forth in Ledingham’s theory (2003) in their investigation of the effects of respondent perceptions of the organization-public relationships and whether or not these perceptions will affect their willingness to remain as customers of the organization and how their perceptions will affect their view of the organization’s performance. Through their investigation, they found that “organization-public relationships, when managed effectively, positively affect the attitudes, evaluations, and behaviors of key public members” (445).

Additionally, Bruning et al. found that “key public members would like to see the organization sponsor the following events: arts in the community, children’s
activities, helping the disadvantaged, health and wellness, recreational activities, and education” (444). They suggest that:

[the organization] would be well-served by communicating its involvement in those activities... to increase understanding among publics and help them to recognize the benefits provided by the organization. In doing so, [the organization] will be able to demonstrate that it adds value to the organization-public relationship, supports activities that improve the community, and positively affect the lives of the public members that it serves. (444)

Bruning and Ledingham (1999) developed a multiple-item, multiple-dimension organization-public relationship scale indicating that these relationships should be conceptualized as multidimensional. They categorized three types of relationships that exist between organizations and key publics: professional, personal, and community. They suggest this instrument developed can be used “to measure the influence that perceptions of the organization-public relationship have on consumer attitudes, predispositions, and behavior, as well as an opportunity to track changes in [these] relationship perceptions over time” (157).
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This descriptive case study examined the consumer backlash McNeil Consumer Healthcare received over its Motrin Moms campaign, and the communications strategy the company utilized to address key publics’ concerns. Ledingham’s model provided a framework in which to evaluate the company’s relationship management techniques.

McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s communication strategy was compiled using information reported in articles featured in online news media sites and information available through Motrin’s website and Johnson & Johnson’s various social media sites in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: During the consumer crisis, what message did McNeil Consumer Healthcare try to communicate to its key publics?

RQ2: What communication methods did McNeil Consumer Healthcare use to deliver this message regarding the consumer crisis?

RQ3: Following the consumer crisis, what steps did McNeil Consumer Healthcare take to repair and manage its relationship with its key publics?
In addition, a media analysis was conducted in order to determine the media’s attitude toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare concerning the consumer crisis. News stories covering the Motrin Moms public relations crisis published by the top ten regional online newspapers in the United States (according to Alexa Top Sites, an online provider of global web metrics) from November 17, 2008, (the first day national news coverage of the story circulated) to November 19, 2008, (the last day national news coverage of the story circulated) were examined. The top ten regional online newspapers in the United States (according to Alexa Top Sites) are:

1. New York Times
2. The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition
3. Washington Post
4. USA Today
5. Examiner.com
6. Los Angeles Times
7. San Francisco Chronicle
8. New York Post Online Edition
9. Houston Chronicle
10. Chicago Tribune

Every sentence in each news article was coded as displaying McNeal Consumer Healthcare in either a positive, negative, or neutral nature. From this, the articles were then classified as having either a positive (P) tone toward the company concerning the consumer crisis (if there were
more positive sentences than negative sentences coded in the news article) or a negative (N) tone toward the company concerning the consumer crisis (if there were more negative sentences than positive sentences coded in the news article):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P-Motrin</td>
<td>The tone of the article is positive toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s crisis response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N-Motrin</td>
<td>The tone of the article is negative toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s crisis response.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the top ten regional online newspapers in the United States covered the consumer crisis, with the exception of the San Francisco Chronicle and the New York Post. In addition, a link to a news story covering the crisis from the Houston Chronicle was found, but was no longer available.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Examining the Details

When the Motrin brand pain reliever launched its Motrin Moms marketing campaign on September 30, 2008, Jack Neff, in a November 24, 2008, article entitled “Crashing Motrin-Gate: A Social Media Case Study,” from Advertising Age reported that it “generated zero online buzz during its first 45 days online at Motrin.com.” According to Michael Learmonth from his November 17, 2008, article entitled “How Twittering Critics Brought Down Motrin Mom Campaign,” from Advertising Age, the campaign, created by the New York office of independent ad agency Taxi, consisted of a web video featured on the brand’s website, as well as print ads in Cookie, Nylon, Parents, Wondertime, and Lucky magazines, according to McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s Director of Communications Mark Boston. The prior year, Johnson and Johnson, the parent company of McNeil Consumer Healthcare,
had recruited the boutique ad agency to market its $18 million Motrin and Children’s Motrin brands (Neff 2008).

The marketing campaign was an attempt to connect with mothers through the common experience (and pain) of raising a child/children, particularly while baby-wearing (Learmonth 2008). The web video features a voice-over of a twenty-something woman:

> Wearing your baby seems to be in fashion. I mean, in theory it’s a great idea. There’s the front baby carrier, the sling, the schwing, the wrap, the pouch. And who knows what else they’ve come up with? Wear the baby on your side, your front, go hands free. Supposedly, it’s a real bonding experience. They say that babies carried close to the body tend to cry less than others. But what about me? Do moms that wear their babies cry more than those who don’t? I sure do! These things put a ton of strain on your back, your neck, your shoulders. Did I mention your back? I mean, I’ll put up with the pain because it’s a good kind of pain; it’s for my kid. Plus, it totally makes me look like an official mom. And so if I look tired and crazy, people will understand why.
> (GlowMarketingCanada 2008)

The web video can be found online on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=X06S1TUBA38. Copies of the campaign’s print ad can be found in Appendices Two and Three of this paper.

Barb Lattin of Colorado took notice of the ad on Saturday, November 15 after seeing it mentioned on a babywearing section of a Yahoo Group for devotees of
“attachment parenting.” She then posted her criticism of the ad on the blog for her business “Perfectly Natural Photography,” specializing in photos of nursing moms (Neff 2008).

Another Colorado-based blogger, Amy Gates - a self-proclaimed “crunchy” wife and mother who writes about attachment parenting and green living, among other things, on her website, Crunchy Domestic Goddess - is credited as the first to tweet on the subject, posting on Twitter just under five hours after Lattin’s mention on her blog.

Thirty minutes later, Los Angeles-based blogger Jessica Gottlieb, after seeing the Motrin ad, tweeted her outrage over the campaign to her 1,018 followers. “I am a satirist, I get humor, I talk about my vagina,” said Gottlieb, who works as a freelance writer for National Lampoon and writes for Silicon Valley Moms Blog and Celias. “I’m just insulted. I’m not an activist. I don’t have an agenda, but I do have children” (Learmonth 2008).

The next day, Sunday, November 16, the Motrin backlash caught the attention of New York blogger and PR consultant Katja Presnal. Presnal, who is also a proprietor of online children’s clothing store Skimbaco, created a nine-minute video comprised of tweets from offended moms (Learmonth
2008). The video, titled “Motrin Ad Makes Moms Mad,” can be found online on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=LhRy1N6R8Q.

By Sunday night, media outlets such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, AP, and Reuters had produced coverage of the blogging mothers’ negative reactions to the brand’s marketing campaign. Subsequent coverage came from USA Today, the Washington Post, and Chicago Tribune (Neff 2008).

At its peak, the Motrin ad was seen by as many as 15,000 people daily since its debut on September 30, according to Alexa data, for a combined 216,000 views through November 21 (Neff 2008). In addition, Presnal’s video got 63,556 views. “By the following Sunday, the Motrin ad controversy was generating as many as 300 tweets an hour, according to TrendRR.com” (Neff 2008). Gottlieb used #motrinmoms to track the tweets, and with a total of about 1,500 tweets among approximately 1,000 Twitter handles, the tag hit the top of Twitter’s “trending topics” by November 17 (Neff 2008).
Motrin Responds

Before 9 p.m. on November 16, 2008, Johnson and Johnson, the makers of the Motrin brand, shut down the Motrin website, and Kathy Widmer, McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s vice president of marketing, began apologizing to several bloggers via email (Learmonth 2008). One blogger, Gates, posted on her blog, Crunchy Domestic Goddess, the following email she received from Widmer on her website:

Dear Amy -

I am the Vice President of Marketing for McNeil Consumer Healthcare. I have responsibility for the Motrin Brand, and am responding to concerns about recent advertising on our website. I am, myself, a mom of 3 daughters.

We certainly did not mean to offend moms through our advertising.

Instead, we had intended to demonstrate genuine sympathy and appreciation for all that parents do for their babies. We believe deeply that moms know best and we sincerely apologize for disappointing you. Please know that we take your feedback seriously and will take swift action with regard to this ad. We are in process of removing it from our website. It will take longer, unfortunately, for it to be removed from magazine print as it is currently on newsstands and in distribution.

-Kathy
By November 17, Motrin’s site was up and running, but in place of the web video was another apology from Widmer on behalf of McNeil Consumer Relations (Learmonth 2008). A screenshot of the apology can be found in Appendix Four of this paper, and a timeline of the events up to this point from Neff can be found in Appendix Five of this paper. In addition, Widmer posted another apology on Johnson & Johnson’s corporate blog, JNJ BTW (Johnson & Johnson By The Way), titled “McNeil Meets Twitter – We Hear You”:

By Kathy Widmer, Vice President of Marketing, McNeil Consumer Healthcare

This weekend, a lot was said about Motrin on Twitter and in the blogosphere. Unfortunately, it was not the kind of conversation that we here at McNeil had hoped to be at the center of.

For those who haven’t been following this, it all began when we ran an advertisement online over the weekend that talked about babywearing – which is a term that we used to describe carrying a child in a sling or wrap.

It was meant to engender sympathy and appreciation for all that parents do for their kids, but did so through an attempt at humor that missed the mark and many moms found offensive.
Now as you can imagine, we certainly didn’t mean to offend moms through our advertising. As a mom of three girls, I understand many of the comments made and agree that we know what’s best for our kids and for ourselves.

On behalf of McNeil, I’m sorry if you found this advertisement insulting.

We are in the process of removing it from our website. Unfortunately, it will take longer for us to remove this advertisement from magazines as several are currently on newsstands and in distribution.

One bright spot is that we have learned through this process – in particular, the importance of paying close attention to the conversations that are taking place online. It has also brought home the importance of taking a broader look at what we say and how it may be interpreted.

(Kathy Widmer, JNJ BTW, posted November 17, 2008)

By Thursday, November 20, a follow-up blog had been posted to JNJ BTW from the site’s editor, Marc Monseau, with a message from Widmer, titled “More on Motrin Moms”:

Earlier today, Kathy Widmer, the Vice President of Marketing for McNeil Healthcare, had a bit more to say about all that they have learned over the past few days – and how they are trying to figure out how to put those learnings into practice.

From Kathy:

So... it’s been almost [four] days since I apologized here for our Motrin advertising. What an unbelievable [four] days it’s been.

Believe me when I say we’ve been taking our own headache medicine here lately!

Btw - if you’re confused by this - we removed our
Motrin ad campaign from the marketplace on Sunday because we realized through your feedback that we had missed the mark and insulted many moms. We didn’t mean to...but we did. We’ve been able to get most of the ads out of circulation, but those in magazines will, unfortunately, be out there for a while.

We are listening to you, and we know that’s the best place to start as we move ahead. More to come on that.

In the end, we have been reminded of age-old lessons that are tried and true:

When you make a mistake – own up to it, and say you’re sorry.

Learn from that mistake.

That’s all... for now.
(Marc Monseau, JNJ BTW, posted November 20, 2008)

Evaluating McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s Relationship Management Techniques

As previously discussed, Ledingham’s interpersonal relationship model provides a framework in which to evaluate the communication strategy utilized by McNeil Consumer Healthcare in response to consumer reaction to the Motrin Moms marketing campaign. Because the focus of this case study was the company’s relationship management techniques during the public relations crisis, the emphasis of this analysis is on “The Coming Apart of an Organization-Public Relationship.”
During Phase One: The Contrasting Phase, in Ledingham’s interpersonal relationship model, after the video ad gained momentum in November 2008, the blogging mothers focused on their perceived differences in terms of social views. For instance, Motrin’s ad was “an attempt to connect with moms through the common experience (and pain) of carrying a child” (Learmonth 2008). According to Widmer, “[It] was meant to engender sympathy and appreciation for all that parents do for their kids” in a humorous way (Widmer 2008). However, “some of the campaign’s more vocal critics” were insulted (Learmonth 2008). They viewed the ad as implying that “moms wear their babies as fashion accessories, or because it ‘totally makes me look like an official mom’” (Learmonth 2008). One offended mother posted about Motrin on her Twitter feed: “Picking on new mothers is vile, it’s as vulnerable as we will ever be and [Motrin] should know better” (Johnson 2008). Another posted: “I can’t even count the ways I am offended right now. Taken aback! This is a serious screw up for such a major company” (Johnson 2008).

However, as Ledingham suggests in Phase One of his model, McNeil Consumer Healthcare recognized the importance of identifying and then exploring the cause of the decline
in consumer support in order to move quickly to save the relationship. As seen in the Motrin-Gate Timeline in Appendix Seven, the Motrin website was shut down before 9 p.m. on Sunday, November 16 – less than twenty-four hours after the first tweet criticizing the ad was posted. In addition, as detailed in the Motrin Responds section on page twenty-eight of this research paper, that same night, Widmer immediately began emailing apologies to offended bloggers. Because the top communicators at McNeil Consumer Healthcare reacted quickly to address the concerns of the blogging mothers, the organization-public relationship never completed Phase 2: The Spiraling Phase, in Ledingham’s model. This phase suggests that “the frequency and quality of communication between the organization and its publics declines, and communication that does carry on is often dishonest or not completely open” (Ledingham 2000). Instead, Widmer, in her November 17 blog posted to JNJ BTW and included on pages twenty-nine and thirty in this research paper, invested time and effort in managing the organization-public relationship, and addressed McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s marketing mistake, saying “One bright spot is that we have learned through this process – in particular, the importance of paying close attention to the
conversations that are taking place online” (Kathy Widmer, JNJ BTW, posted November 17, 2008). She then validated the needs of Motrin’s consumers, adding “It has also brought home the importance of taking a broader look at what we say and how it may be interpreted” (Kathy Widmer, JNJ BTW, posted November 17, 2008).

Research Questions Answered

RQ1: During the consumer crisis, what message did McNeil Consumer Healthcare try to communicate to its key publics?

Widmer, in both her November 16 emails sent to offended bloggers (included on page twenty-eight of this research paper) and her November 17 message (included on pages twenty-nine and thirty of this research paper) posted on Johnson and Johnson’s corporate blog, JNJ BTW, clarified that the marketing campaign was not meant to be offensive, but instead was “intended to demonstrate genuine sympathy and appreciation for all that parents do for their babies” (Kathy Widmer, JNJ BTW, posted November 17, 2008).

In addition, she apologized on behalf of the Motrin brand in her November 16 emails, and the November 17 corporate blog post and Motrin website apology (included on page twenty-eight and on pages twenty-nine and thirty of
this research paper, and in Appendix Four, respectively). She also emphasized (in the November 16 emails, the November 17 blog post and company website apology, and the November 20 follow-up blog posted on JNJ BTW, included in this research paper) that not only was consumer feedback taken seriously, but that the company was “in the process of removing [the ad] from [Motrin’s] website,” adding “Unfortunately, it will take longer for us to remove this advertisement from magazines as several are currently on newsstands and in distribution” (Kathy Widmer, JNJ BTW, posted November 17, 2008).

In an attempt to identify and sympathize with consumers, Widmer also mentioned in three separate messages (the November 16 emails and the November 17 corporate blog post and website apology) that she, too, was a mother, saying “As a mom of three girls, I understand many of the comments made and agree that we know what’s best for our kids and for ourselves” (Kathy Widmer, JNJ BTW, posted November 17, 2008).

RQ2: What communication methods did McNeil Consumer Healthcare use to deliver this message in light of the consumer crisis?

In her initial post on Johnson & Johnson’s company blog on November 17 (included on page twenty-nine and
thirty of this research paper), Widmer wrote that the company learned a valuable lesson in understanding “the importance of paying close attention to the conversations that are taking place online.” To emphasize this lesson learned, she communicated to the blogging mothers in the same medium in which they used to advance their platform; over the Internet.

Widmer posted the first apology on November 17 (Appendix Four of this research paper) on Motrin’s website — the original source of contention — after removing the web video. In addition, personalized apology emails (included on page twenty-eight of this research paper) were sent on the night of November 16 to the most vocal of the disgruntled bloggers. And Widmer posted on the company’s blog twice; her initial November 17 apology (included on pages twenty-nine and thirty of this research paper) and the November 20 follow-up (included on page thirty of this research paper) appealing to the Internet-savvy blogging mothers.

**RQ3: Following the consumer crisis, what steps did McNeil Consumer Healthcare take to repair and manage its relationship with its key publics?**

In terms of McNeil Healthcare’s consumer crisis, the initial relationship management effort was focused on
removing the offensive advertising from circulation and apologizing to the offended consumers.

Since then, Johnson & Johnson has consistently utilized social media. Shirley S. Wang, in her November 17, 2008 article entitled “J&J Gets Caught in a Sling over Internet Motrin Ad,” from the Wall Street Journal, reported that before the consumer crisis, Johnson & Johnson had already staked its claim in the social media world:

Pharmaceutical companies have been slow to enter the social media space, for fear of running afoul of regulatory guidelines governing marketing. J&J, however, has embraced the technology, launching in the last few months a health channel on YouTube, and groups and applications on Facebook, in addition to consumer-oriented websites and blogs. The idea is to get consumers talking in a kind of digital word-of-mouth network about J&J products. (Wang 2008)

In an effort to engage and continue building relationships with the social networking community, the company is represented annually at BlogHer, a conference held once a year supporting women and blogging. In addition, Johnson & Johnson has since designed a corporate Facebook page, launched a health channel on YouTube, and created a presence on Twitter with several accounts (@JNJNews, previously @JNJComm, @JNJStories, @JNJHistory,
and @JNJVideo) (Marc Monseau, JNJ BTW, posted May 17, 2011).

Media Analysis

Ten news articles covering the Motrin Moms public relations crisis published by the top ten regional online newspapers in the United States from November 17, 2008, to November 19, 2008 were coded for the media’s attitude toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s communication response to the Motrin Moms marketing campaign consumer backlash. The coded newspaper articles can be found in Appendix Six of this research paper. The results of the coded newspaper articles are recorded in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Newspaper</th>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Coded Sentences</th>
<th>Media Attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>Moms and Motrin</td>
<td>Lisa Belkin</td>
<td>28-Negative</td>
<td>N-Motrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18-Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5-Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3-Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>Motrin Makers Feel Moms' Pain, Pull</td>
<td>Annys Shin</td>
<td>17-Negative</td>
<td>N-Motrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13-Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the ten articles coded, all ten displayed a negative tone toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s crisis response:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USA Today</th>
<th>Babywearing Ad</th>
<th>Media Attitude toward Motrin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offended Moms get tweet revenge over Motrin ads</td>
<td>Laura Petrecca</td>
<td>14-Negative 2-Positive 3-Neutral N-Motrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slings and arrows: Online backlash ends Motrin ad</td>
<td>Linda A. Johnson (AP Business Writer)</td>
<td>18-Negative 9-Neutral N-Motrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>Slings and arrows: Online backlash ends Motrin ad</td>
<td>Linda A. Johnson (AP Business Writer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moms Against Motrin</td>
<td>Sondra Santos Drahos</td>
<td>8-Negative 3-Neutral N-Motrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examiner.com</td>
<td>Moms Against Motrin</td>
<td>Sondra Santos Drahos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moms tell Motrin to buzz off, company apologizes</td>
<td>Terreece Clarke</td>
<td>13-Negative 18-Neutral N-Motrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examiner.com</td>
<td>Moms tell Motrin to buzz off, company apologizes</td>
<td>Terreece Clarke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video ad a headache for Motrin</td>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>10-Negative 3-Neutral N-Motrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>Video ad a headache for Motrin</td>
<td>Associated Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Caves to Moms' Motrin ad backlash</td>
<td>Trine Tsouderos</td>
<td>18-Negative 2-Neutral N-Motrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Tribune</td>
<td>Company Caves to Moms' Motrin ad backlash</td>
<td>Trine Tsouderos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, in those ten articles, 139 sentences (62 percent) displayed a negative attitude toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare, while only twelve sentences (5 percent) displayed a positive attitude, and seventy-four sentences (33 percent) displayed a neutral attitude:

It is noteworthy that both USA Today and the Los Angeles Times published the same article from The Associated Press on their sites. As shown in the results table, both the articles’ tone was negative toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare in relation to consumer criticism of the Motrin Moms marketing campaign.
Some sentences coded as displaying a positive tone toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare referenced Johnson & Johnson’s involvement in the social media arena. For example, Wang, in her *The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition* article, “J&J Pulls Online Motrin Ad after Social-Media Backlash” explained: “Compared with other pharmaceutical companies, J&J has been quick to embrace the technology, having recently launched a health channel on YouTube, among other steps” (Wang 2008). Other sentences coded as displaying a positive tone supported the Motrin Moms marketing campaign, and included comments from bloggers, for example “I could see how some good intentioned marketing team thought they were sympathizing with moms and laughing with us, not at us” (Shin 2008). One sentence introduced the company as having “masterfully linked its corporate image to babies for decades” (Wang, J&J Gets Caught in a Sling over Internet Motrin Ad, 2008).

Some sentences coded as displaying a neutral tone toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare were part of the dialogue featured from the campaign’s video ad (Belkin 2008). Others gave details on what the marketing campaign entailed or explained various social messaging tools (Petrecca 2008).
In contrast, some key words or phrases used in sentences that were coded as displaying a negative tone toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare included describing the ads as “snarky” (Petrecca 2008), as well as a “faux pas” and a “misstep” (Wang 2008). In addition, one article featured comments from Peter Shankman, founder and CEO of The Geek Factory, Inc., a Social Media, Marketing and PR Strategy firm, explaining that Motrin “messed up” and that the video ad “was stupid and patronizing” (Belkin 2008). Another article featured insight from David Smith, CEO of digital media agency Mediasmith. He described the company’s apology as sounding stiff, saying “Their current response looks like one from a committee, carefully drafted and oh so corporate” (Petrecca 2008). One article criticized the company for acting too quickly in taking down the web video (Tsouderos 2008).
Abbey Klaassen, in her March 30, 2009, article “Using Social Media to Listen to Consumers,” featured in Advertising Age, offered evidence supporting that not just Motrin but marketers in general are often too quick to react when it comes to criticism from even a small group of vocal consumers. Klaassen presented statistics from a Lightspeed Research survey on the Motrin Moms consumer crisis:

- Almost 90 percent of women had never seen the ad.
- Once they saw it, about 45 percent liked the video, 41 percent had no feelings about it, and 15 percent didn’t like it.
- Even fewer, 8 percent, said it negatively affected their feelings of the brand, compared with the 32 percent who said it made them like the brand more. (Klaassen 2009)

In addition, Klaassen illustrated that during the consumer crisis, only about 0.15 percent of the world’s Internet users had a Twitter account, accounting for approximately 1.1 million Americans. She suggested that instead of reacting to the consumer backlash by removing
the advertising, the company should have probed further into the criticism and engaged in a two-way dialogue.

Klaassen offered advice on how to listen and respond more effectively to consumers:

*Know Your Consumers’ Social-Media Habits:* "What you see is not necessarily representative of People using the social technologies, but the people Using those social technologies and like to talk," said Josh Bernoff, VP-principal analyst at Forrester Research.

*Have a Response Mechanism in Place:* Don't wait until you have vocal critics to design a response plan. Rather than pulling its ad and issuing an apology on its site that confused the 90 percent of people who weren't aware of the criticism, Motrin could have engaged the angry mob.

*Look for Changes in Chatter:* If suddenly the conversation doubles, or if people start talking about your brand in a way they weren't the day before, something important is happening. "Changes in attitudes are more significant about attitudes themselves," Bernoff said.

*Pinpoint Passion:* Your critics can provide you with insight into a base you didn't know existed. Who, for example, were these "attachment parenting" moms so outraged by Motrin? Not all criticism is cause for action, said Diane Hessan, CEO of Communispace, a private online community. But it is cause to dig deeper. (Klaassen 2009)

As featured in the media analysis of this research paper, eight of the top ten regional online newspapers in the United States featured at least one, if not several, articles covering the Motrin Moms consumer crisis. And of
the ten articles coded, 100 percent were coded as having a negative tone toward McNeil Consumer Healthcare in regard to consumer criticism of the Motrin Moms marketing campaign (included in this research paper). Contrary to the opinions of critics such as Klassen, who claim the company reacted prematurely in pulling the ads in response to what she describes as “a small group of vocal consumers,” the researcher proposes, based on these findings (RES 697), that the minimal impact felt by the company in response to consumer criticism was the result of McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s communication strategy and relationship management solution to the backlash. According to the evaluation of the company’s relationship management techniques using Ledingham’s interpersonal relationship model (included on pages thirty-one through thirty-three of this research paper), because McNeil Consumer Healthcare recognized the first signs of the “Coming Apart” of the organization-public relationship, the top communicators were able to position the organization-public relationship more favorably in order to prevent its decline.
Implications for Future Research

The media analysis provided quantifiable results to gauge not just the influence of the blogging mothers in attracting the attention of the top ten most popular regional online newspapers in the United States, but also the media’s influence on the tone of the content in the articles, as well. In addition, Ledingham’s interpersonal relationship model provided an instrument in which to evaluate McNeil Consumer Healthcare’s relationship management techniques.

The length of time that has elapsed since the consumer crisis occurred in 2008 until now negatively affected the research process. Because of the time factor, some of the online newspaper articles were no longer available. In addition, many of the case’s key individuals, such as Widmer, are no longer employed with McNeil Consumer Healthcare (she is now Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer at Elizabeth Arden).

For future research, a case study focusing on the Motrin Moms marketing campaign would be valuable in shedding light on the strategies McNeil Consumer Healthcare utilized to determine the marketing message and the key publics for its crisis management efforts.


Mighty Red Pen. 


NevilleHobson.com. 


APPENDIX ONE

THE THREE SPHERES OF COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE

(Dozier et al. 1995)
“Wearing your baby is in fashion. There’s the front-back carrier, sling, shwing and the pouch. Holding your baby so close is supposed to make them cry less. But what about me? I think I cry more. Carriers put a ton of strain on your back and shoulders. But I’ll put up with the pain because it’s a good pain, a worthy pain. And it totally makes me look like an official mom, so if I look tired and crazy, people will know why.”

(Mighty Red Pen, posted November 29, 2008)
APPENDIX THREE

CHILDREN’S MOTRIN PRINT AD

“I would kill to get some sleep right now. No really. Try me. Ok, so I don’t really mean that but sometimes I secretly think it. If all us moms said exactly what was on our minds when dealing with our kids’ high fevers, you might as well commit us. Actually, that’s not a bad idea—at least it would be quiet. Hey, all we really want is for our kids to feel good again. We want to take that fever down. Way down. And then our crazy little kids can go back to being their crazy little selves, drawing on the walls and sticking their hands in the toilet.”

(Chas Edwards, ChasNote, November 21, 2008)
APPENDIX FOUR

MOTRIN WEBSITE APOLOGY

(Neville Hobson, NevilleHobson.com, posted November 29, 2008)
APPENDIX FIVE

A MOTRIN-GATE TIMELINE

A Motrin-Gate Timeline

Sept. 30 - Johnson & Johnson posts an online video on Motrin.com featuring a voice-over of a mom who carries her baby in a sling because it's good for her kid and she sees it as "a fashion statement" and validation of her as "an official mom."

Nov. 14 - The first discoverable blog post on the video from MagicCitySlingers says the "Motrin ad lady" is looking tired and crazy because she's using a schwing-style sling, and should instead learn to use a non-schwing carrier correctly.

Nov. 15 (5:54 p.m.): Barb Lattin, a Fort Collins, Colo., mom sees a post about the Motrin ad on a Yahoo Group dedicated to "attachment parenting." Offended, Ms. Lattin, who specializes in photos of nursing moms as mementos, criticizes the ad on the blog for her business, Perfectly Natural Photography.

Nov. 15 (10:28 p.m.): Amy Gates of the Colorado-based CrunchyDomesticGoddess blog posts the first tweet on the ad at Twitter.

Nov. 15 (10:58 p.m.): Blogger Jessica Gottlieb (JessicaGottlieb.com) posts another tweet criticizing the Motrin ad.

Nov. 16: Ms. Gottlieb uses #motrinmoms tag to help keep track of tweets, and the tag hits the top of Twitter's "trending topics" (with a total of about 1,500 tweets among around 1,000 Twitter handles by Nov. 17). Blogger, online retailer and PR consultant Katja Presnal creates YouTube video showing anti-Motrin posts. About 300 blogs post on the controversy, and some of the most active begin contacting mainstream media outlets about the story.
**Nov. 16:** J&J shuts down Motrin website before 9 p.m. VP-marketing Kathy Widmer sends apology to people who had e-mailed complaints and says the campaign will be discontinued.


(Neff 2008)
APPENDIX SIX

CODED NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

KEY

Sentences coded as having a negative tone

Sentences coded as having a positive tone

Sentences coded as having a neutral tone

1. Moms and Motrin

By Lisa Belkin, New York Times

Odds are that a number of executives responsible for advertising Motrin find themselves with a bit of a headache today.

It all began with an online ad posted Saturday on the company’s website. It was about “baby wearing” – i.e. carrying a child in a sling or a wrap, rather than pushing them in a stroller or carrying them in your arms. For some parents it is something they do simply because it works. For others it goes far deeper than that – part of a philosophy of being close to the baby whenever possible.

The ad itself, read aloud by a 20-something voice on the motrin.com website, said this:

Wearing your baby seems to be in fashion. I mean, in theory it’s a great idea. There’s the front baby carrier, sling, schwing, wrap, pouch. And who knows what else they’ve come up with. Wear your baby on your side, your front, go hands free. Supposedly, it’s a real bonding experience. They say that babies carried close to the body tend to cry less than others. But what about me? Do moms that wear their babies cry more than those who don’t. I sure do! These things put a ton of strain on your back, your neck, your shoulders. Did I mention your back? I mean, I’ll put up with the
pain because it’s a good kind of pain; it’s for my kid. Plus, it totally makes me look like an official mom. And so if I look tired and crazy, people will understand why.

Online Moms did not respond to the ad by racing out for Motrin. They were offended by the suggestion that they carry their babies to be “fashionable”. They were outraged at the idea that they look “crazy”. They vehemently disagreed with the phrasing that “in theory” carrying your baby around is a good idea.

By Saturday evening they were the most tweeted subject on Twitter. By Sunday there was a nine minute video on YouTube, to the tune of Danny Boy, showing screen shots of the outraged Twitter posts interspersed with photos of Moms carrying babies in slings.

Bloggers began calling for boycotts. Bloggers asked their readers to alert the mainstream press. A few voices chimed in to say they didn’t find the ad to be that big a deal. There are a few more examples here and here.)

By Sunday afternoon a few bloggers and tweeters had gotten the ad agency that created the ad on the phone, to find they didn’t know a lot about Twitter and didn’t seem to have a clue that there was so much anger piling up online. And Peter Shankman, a public relations all-star who knows everything and then some about new media, was giving the manufacturers some advice:

I’m not siding with Motrin. They messed up, granted. I’m ok with that. Companies mess up all the time. They fix the problem, and it usually doesn’t make the radar screen. The problem is, Motrin happened to mess up at the expense, and in the face of, one of the most vocal, quickest-to-blog, “strongest-to-band-together-and-form-one-opinion-like-the-Borg” collectives out there – The Mommy-Blogging community.

Now I am NOT slagging on Mommy-Bloggers. Not in the slightest. Nor, am I saying they’re over-reacting to the commercial, which, by rights, was stupid and patronizing. What I AM saying though, is that Motrin will pay a MUCH bigger price, as opposed to if they’d
messed up in front of say, “Construction-Worker-Bloggers.” Mommy-Bloggers are not a voice to be messed with, probably because they’re one of the most clearly identifiable voices on the web. You have a kid? You blog about said kid? You’re a Mommy-blogger. You don’t need an advanced degree in particle physics to see what these bloggers have in common.

Or, as one Tweet put it:

note to self … never piss off moms … especially Twitter moms … they can be a nasty bunch ;)

2. J&J Gets Caught in a Sling Over Internet Motrin Ad

By Shirley S. Wang
The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition

Johnson & Johnson, the maker of Baby Powder and Band-Aids, has masterfully linked its corporate image to babies for decades. So it is especially interesting that a misstep in the baby space sparked an uproar in the Internet’s social networking space that left the healthcare giant apologizing to its most important customers: Moms.

The faux pas was a new online ad launched over the weekend for the company’s over-the-counter-pain reliever Motrin. That’s not a product for babies, but the commercial was targeted at mothers who need relief from back pain from carrying — or, as the ad says, wearing — their babies in a sling.

The ad touched off a storm of protest from Moms who thought the message trivialized women’s pain and the popular baby-carrying practice. They aired their views online, via blogs, the video-sharing site YouTube, and Twitter, a free social messaging tool. The company yanked the ad today from the Motrin website and offered its apologies there and on its on-line consumer blog, JNJ BTW.

It was an attempt at humor that misfired, wrote Kathy Widmer, VP of Marketing at McNeil Consumer Healthcare, the J&J subsidiary that makes Motrin. You can judge for
yourself about the humor or the pain by clicking on the accompanying video.

Pharmaceutical companies have been slow to enter the social media space, for fear of running afoul of regulatory guidelines governing marketing. **J&J, however, has embraced the technology, launching in the last few months a health channel on YouTube, and groups and applications on Facebook, in addition to consumer-oriented websites and blogs. The idea is to get consumers talking in a kind of digital word-of-mouth network about J&J products.**

Well, it works. "One bright spot is that we have learned through this process – in particular, the importance of paying close attention to the conversations that are taking place online," Widmer wrote on JNJ BTW. "It has also brought home the importance of taking a broader look at what we say and how it may be interpreted."

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3. J&J Pulls Motrin Ad After Social-Media Backlash

By Shirley S. Wang
The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition

Johnson & Johnson pulled an online advertisement for its over-the-counter pain pill Motrin after it triggered protest on the Internet from consumers who thought the ad was an insensitive portrayal of women's pain.

Over the weekend, the New Brunswick, N.J., health-care giant launched the ad, which was geared toward mothers who get back pain from carrying their babies in slings.

But angry viewers quickly objected, voicing their opinion via blogs, the video-sharing site YouTube and Twitter, a free social-messaging tool. The protests called for consumers to boycott the medicine, saying the ad trivialized women's pain and the method of carrying babies.

The incident illustrates how quickly consumer response on so-called social-media sites can influence corporate behavior. Social media include such sites as YouTube and Facebook and can serve as marketing tools by enabling online word-of-mouth communication on the Web.
Compared with other pharmaceutical companies, J&J has been quick to embrace the technology, having recently launched a health channel on YouTube, among other steps.

The company yanked the ad from the Motrin Web site and apologized there and on its consumer blog, JNJ BTW, which stands for J&J By the Way.

"It was meant to engender sympathy and appreciation for all that parents do for their kids, but did so through an attempt at humor that missed the mark and many moms found offensive," wrote Kathy Widmer, vice president of marketing, McNeil Consumer Healthcare, on JNJ BTW.

The company also is pulling the ad from conventional media: magazine advertising.

4. Motrin Makers Feel Moms’ Pain, Pull Babywearing Ad

By Annys Shin, Washington Post

The makers of Motrin, trying to appeal to hip, young moms with an ad that likened babywearing to a fashion statement, yesterday responded to outraged mothers by pulling the ad and apologizing for it.

Starting on Saturday, parents across the country took to blogs, the online video site YouTube, and social networking tools such as Twitter to complain about the online and print ad, which touted the pain reliever as a treatment for backaches caused by infant carriers.

The Motrin ad consisted only of words, graphics, and the knowing voice of an apparent first-time mom.

"Wearing your baby seems to be in fashion. I mean, in theory, it's a great idea . . . supposedly, it's a real bonding experience," the voiceover said. "They say that babies carried close to the body tend to cry less than others. But what about me? Do moms who wear their babies cry more than those who don't? I sure do. These things put a ton of strain on your back."
Calls for a boycott quickly followed. By Sunday evening, the digital tsunami of protest forced the drug's maker, McNeil Consumer Healthcare, a division of Johnson and Johnson based in Fort Washington, Pa., to remove the ad from its Web site and post a statement.

"With regard to the recent Motrin advertisement, we have heard you . . . please accept our sincere apology," reads the message signed by Kathy Widmer, the company's vice president of marketing.

A print version of the ad still appears in Lucky, a women's fashion magazine that is already on newsstands. And it's too late to pull the ad from upcoming issues of Nylon and Cookie magazines, McNeil spokesman Marc Boston said yesterday.

The controversial ad, which debuted online Sept. 30, was part of a marketing campaign called "We Feel Your Pain," and tried to stand out from a well-worn genre of painkiller ads that feature moms in various back-breaking tableaus such as lugging groceries, hoisting a child, or picking up toys.

The ad was developed in-house with the help of an outside agency, Boston said, adding that he would not comment further.

The critical storm hit just in time for International Babywearing Week, which began Nov. 12 and ends today.

Some parents didn't get what all the hubbub was about. In a blog entry titled "Why So Upset? Maybe Someone Needs a Motrin," Alexis Martin Neely, a family legal expert based in the Los Angeles area and a self-described "baby-wearing mom," wrote: "I could see how some good intentioned marketing team thought they were sympathizing with moms and laughing with us, not at us."

But chatter about the Motrin ad on Twitter over the weekend was overwhelmingly negative. And as of yesterday evening, 821 people had joined a page on the social networking site Facebook titled "Babywearing isn't painful. Boycott Motrin for saying it is."
Some parents and physicians criticized the ad as inaccurate and misleading.

When worn properly, baby carriers are no more painful than holding a child, some doctors said. Baby carrier use is supported by many pediatricians, including William Sears and Harvey Karp, who are authors of well-known child-rearing books.

Research, which grew out of studies of premature infants in hospital settings, has also shown that increased contact between newborns and their mothers can reduce crying and help an infant sleep better. A 1986 study by Canadian researchers published in the journal Pediatrics concluded that using a baby carrier was beneficial to infants.

"It's not a matter of making a fashion statement but meeting our babies' needs," said Maria Blois, the Dallas-based author of "Babywearing: The Benefits and Beauty of This Ancient Tradition."

Karen Krueger, a spokeswoman for Takoma Attachment Parenting, a Takoma Park group, said the ad was a case of McNeil executives "reaching a tad too far to come up with a hip, edgy way of selling Motrin."

One irate mother addressing Motrin marketers in a YouTube video put it another way: "My headaches have nothing to do with wearing my baby," she said. "My headache right now was caused by you."

5. Offended Moms Get Tweet Revenge Over Motrin Ads

By Laura Petrecca, USA TODAY

The maker of painkiller Motrin got a painful lesson in the power of online social networking.

McNeil Consumer Healthcare is yanking new Motrin ads after an outpouring of negative "tweets," or postings, via Twitter, video on YouTube and postings on other social sites.
"Twitter moms took on Big Pharma," says Gene Liebel, director of user experience at interactive agency Huge.

Twitter lets users communicate with text-message-like "micro" posts via cellphone, instant messaging or the Web. Many of its popular, regular posters have thousands of followers.

The ads, launched in magazines and online on Sept. 30, centered on new moms who carry their babies in slings (and might need Motrin). They likened the sling to a fashion accessory and said that while toting the baby can be tough, it "totally makes me look like an official mom."

Some moms saw the ads as snarky pokes at motherhood. Backlash hit a boiling point by Sunday, particularly with Twitter bloggers, even though some warned about overreacting.

By Sunday night, McNeil had sent an apology to bloggers and on Monday posted a separate apology on Motrin.com. "We have heard your concerns about the ad," says a statement by Kathy Widmer, marketing vice president. "We are parents ourselves and take feedback from moms very seriously. We are in the process of removing this ad from all media."

David Smith, CEO of digital media agency Mediasmith, criticized the apology as sounding stiff. "Their current response looks like one from a committee, carefully drafted and oh so corporate," he says. "In a world where a bunch of blogger moms are commenting on (its) practice, a slightly more human response was probably called for."

Liebel says McNeil should have been on top of the simmering controversy sooner but says McNeil can learn from it. Now that it knows the power of Twitter bloggers, McNeil could tap into this group for feedback before launching the next ad campaign. And, he says, "In the long term, (Motrin) will get smarter faster than other brands after getting through this."

The McNeil ad, spoofs of it and consumer video responses can be found at YouTube by searching under keywords "Motrin" and "mom."
6. Slings and Arrows: Online Backlash Ends Motrin Ad

By Linda A. Johnson (AP Business Writer), USA Today

TRENTON, N.J. — Can a tongue-in-cheek ad for a popular pain reliever backfire and turn into a huge headache for one of the most respected health product marketers?

You bet -- if the ad appears to be making fun of new mothers and their babies.

That's what happened over the weekend with an edgy Johnson & Johnson video ad for Motrin that riffed on the trend of new mothers "wearing their babies" in slings and wraps, saying the devices cause back and neck pain. The ad was on the Web site motrin.com, implying that Motrin, made by J&J's McNeil Consumer Healthcare unit, would help moms deal with what it called "a good kind of pain."

"Supposedly it's a real bonding experience," the announcer says over catchy graphics. "It totally makes me look like an official mom."

Wrong approach, apparently.

Dozens, if not hundreds, of "mom bloggers" started blasting the ad on the social networking site Twitter, with quite a few suggesting a Motrin boycott.

J&J, upon learning of the criticism, took the site down over the weekend. On Monday, it went back up, with the video ad replaced by an apology from McNeil Consumer Healthcare marketing head Kathy Widmer.

Among the colorful Twitter commentary:

"Picking on new mothers is vile, it's as vulnerable as we will ever be and they should know better."

"I can't even count the ways I am offended right now. Taken aback! This is a serious screw up for such a major company."

"Wow Motrin, you REALLY messed up with that ad. No more Motrin for my family. MobileMommy."
"I credit a large portion of my children's happiness to baby wearing. thecouponcoup."

"NO to Motrin. Generic ibuprofen works for me! And wearing my son never gave me back pain. cutiebootycakes."

"The company takes feedback from parents and caregivers very seriously and we sincerely apologize for any concerns raised" by the ad, McNeil spokesman Marc Boston said in an interview.

He said the ad still will appear in a few magazines hitting newsstands now or in the next few weeks. Those include the parenting magazine Cookie and a shopping magazine, Lucky.

The apology doesn't appear to have closed the subject, though.

One blogger with some spare time or perhaps a nanny put together a video of criticism highlights.

Meanwhile, lots of blogger moms, and some dads, continue posting, with many saying they don't see why the ad became such a big deal -- a good question, as Boston said the video ad was first posted back on Sept. 30 but didn't draw comments until recently.

Remarks Monday included "In all seriousness, can't the motrinmoms find something more important to get irate about? I mean, c'mon ... Darfur, maybe?"

7. Moms Against Motrin

By: Sondra Santos Drahos, Examiner.com

Mommies around the blogosphere have spoken: As reported by Early Childhood Parenting Examiner Angele Sionna, a recent Motrin ad campaign sparked Internet outrage by moms and the campaign has since been pulled. Motrin already posted an apology letter on the homepage of their site, reflecting the fact that they have responded to the complaints and outrage by pulling the ad.
What's most disturbing about this entire campaign is that, as Kathy Widmer writes, they "are parents themselves." Huh. Apparently, these parents were all having a very bad day when they made the decision to create and approve the ad campaign where they mock and offend mommies from all walks of life.

Personally, I didn't wear my baby as much as I would have liked to. I went back to work early on and my son either stayed in his playseat, bouncer or stroller when he wasn't sleeping or eating.

I felt the pain of the moms that the Motrin ad was trying (with no success) to appeal to. If I were to have another baby, I would certainly choose to wear him or her in one of the many amazing baby slings that have been created since the time my son was born.

Moms should be praised and honored in our society, especially these days when most of us work outside the home and manage the household and hectic schedules, menus and after school activities that keep us on the move.

If there's any pain felt by moms today, it's from the lack of respect that companies, like Motrin, encourage by sending a message to the world that "people will understand why" mom looks "tired and crazy."

8. Moms Tell Motrin to Buzz Off, Company Apologizes

By: Terreece Clarke, Examiner.com

Twitter and the [blogosphere] was mobilized this weekend against corporate wrong doing to great [effect]. The news went viral and before long, bloggers and Tweeters had combined in one voice uplifted in a rage against "the man."

So what got the forces organized? What brought a huge company to its knees within hours? Mommy-bloggers. The Motrin people thought this ad:

Wearing your baby seems to be in fashion. I mean, in theory it’s a great idea. There’s the front baby
carrier, sling, schwing, wrap, pouch. And who knows what else they’ve come up with. Wear your baby on your side, your front, go hands free. Supposedly, it’s a real bonding experience. They say that babies carried close to the body tend to cry less than others. But what about me? Do moms that wear their babies cry more than those who don’t? I sure do! These things put a ton of strain on your back, your neck, your shoulders. Did I mention your back? I mean, I’ll put up with the pain because it’s a good kind of pain; it’s for my kid. Plus, it totally makes me look like an official mom. And so if I look tired and crazy, people will understand why.

would be appealing to mothers. Apparently, quite a few mothers didn’t like the practice of baby-wearing to be deemed a fashion trend nor did they appreciate it being a "supposed" bonding experience. Lastly, calling a mother crazy for doing so seemed to grate on quite a few nerves as well.

Since the ill-fated add was discovered moms across the net have blogged and tweeted their severe displeasure and while they say all press is good press, Motrin apparently didn't think so and, according to Lisa Belkin over at New York Times' Motherlode blog, Motrin quickly issued an apology and pulled the ad from the web. Unfortunately, they couldn't pull the print version that have already hit the stands so they should expect a steady influx of unhappy mamas.

I am a babywearer and it actually not only calmed my babies, it helped me with the all-important Kangaroo Care my second child needed because she was having trouble with breastfeeding. While I wasn't particularly offended by being called crazy or that maybe I was hitching on the celebrity bandwagon, I did have to crack a smile at the quick and fierce reaction from the moms out there.

The lesson in this - beyond Motrin needing to hire some experts in social media to handle their campaigns - is the awesome power of the Internet and its ability to pull together people for a common purpose. President-elect Obama used this great effect.
Think of what more will be accomplished if those who share a common interest continue to combine forces across wireless signals. A great lesson parents can teach their kids is how to organize their online community for great causes - empower your kids to initiate change!

Poor Motrin - never mess with moms!

9. Video Ad a Headache for Motrin

Associated Press, Los Angeles Times

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"Wow Motrin, you REALLY messed up with that ad. No more Motrin for my family. MobileMommy."

10. Company Caves to Moms’ Motrin Ad Backlash

By Trine Tsouderos, Chicago Tribune

Offend mommy bloggers at your own peril. They can chew you up and spit you out in a day.

That's what happened to McNeil Consumer Healthcare's new ad campaign for Motrin. Saturday morning, all was fine. By Monday, a contrite McNeil had yanked the campaign and its vice president of marketing was busy issuing apologies.

The offense? An online ad aimed at moms who, the ad surmised, might need Motrin to ease back pain caused by using slings and such to carry their babies.

Some bloggers found it intolerably condescending and snarky and by Saturday night, Twitter, a microblogging service, was flooded with anti-Motrin "tweets."

"It was on fire," said Stephanie Precourt, who writes the blog Adventures in Babywearing. "Everybody was talking about it."

Within hours, YouTube and parent video-blogging sites like Newbaby.com were awash in pro-sling/anti-Motrin videos.

Katja Presnal stayed up until 4 a.m. Sunday making a video of Twitter reactions interspersed with baby-wearing photos e-mailed to her overnight by outraged moms. Her video was viewed more than 12,000 times. "I thought maybe 50 moms would see it," she marveled.

By Monday, McNeil, a division of Johnson & Johnson, had pulled the ad, posted an apology on the Motrin Web site and sent personal messages to some bloggers.

"I am, myself, a mom of three daughters," Kathy Widmer, McNeil's marketing vice president, wrote to Presnal. "We
certainly did not mean to offend moms through our advertising."

But perhaps McNeil surrendered too quickly. Monday afternoon, the Twitter tide had turned. As one commentator wrote: "Aren't there more substantive and meaningful issues where you could direct your combined will?"