

## NYAMA conference: Brand crises a constant challenge

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New York—For marketers, preventing and reversing brand crises has become a constant challenge, and an essential part of their jobs with the rise of social media. That was the message delivered as part of an educational series presented by the [New York chapter of the American Marketing Association](#) last week in Manhattan.

“The issue isn’t if a crisis will hit us, but when,” said Randall Ringer, an NYAMA board member and managing partner with marketing and design company Verse Group, who moderated a panel discussion.

According to panelist Kirk Stewart, exec VP at public affairs consultancy APCO Worldwide, a corporate crisis can be an opportunity for a brand, illuminating corporate culture and character while under attack.

“For whatever reason, companies lose sight of the simple stuff when in a crisis and get defensive and distracted,” Stewart said. He cited several brands—Goldman Sachs, Starbucks and Toyota, among them—that have suffered recent public perception problems but, he said, “recovered and are even stronger today, largely because of adhering to certain principles.”

Among Stewart’s list of crisis principles are taking responsibility for a problem, being transparent, rallying core supporters (such as employees and loyal customers) and preparing for the unexpected.

Jenny Dervin, director-corporate communications with JetBlue Airways, related some recent public perception problems experienced by the airline, many of them weather-related, which resulted in passengers being stranded.

“We sent an e-mail of apology to every person who ever flew JetBlue,” Dervin said, of one of the crises. “We also announced a customer bill of rights, with details about compensation if service is ever interrupted again because of us.”

The company now maintains a Twitter-based early warning system, Dervin said. JetBlue maintains a full-time staff of 17 employees monitoring all mentions of the company on the microblogging site. Top executives receive reports of the most prominent positive and negative comments each day

Marketers themselves have created the circumstances that demand this kind of proactive approach to customer response, according to panelest Erich Joachimsthaler, CEO of marketing consultancy Vivaldi Partners.

“We’ve spent all this time building our brands through emotional connections, and telling people that our brand is their brand,” he said. “And now, we declare it a brand crisis when our customers want to talk to us. Our attempts at engagement actually worked, for God’s sake!”

