

Starbucks red cup design

[Business](#), [Company](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [1. Yes, all PR is good PR.](#) \n \t
2. [2. Social media is awesome.](#) \n \t
3. [3. Opportunities abound for opportunists.](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Starbucks, one of the largest and most visible corporations in the world, is again in the crosshairs of haters everywhere -- or at least on social media. Fresh off recent controversies, such as last year's pumpkin spice controversy or this year's widely criticized RaceTogether campaign, the newest dissension seems to be far less contentious, though no less visible.

To introduce the dispute, understand that every year Starbucks welcomes the holiday season with the introduction of its red holiday cup. The event is so popular and anticipated, it has even given rise to countdown clocks. More impressively, according to Starbucks, " within the first 48 hours of red Starbucks cups launching last year, a photo of a Starbucks holiday cup was shared on Instagram every 14 seconds."

That is as bad as selfies.

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In previous years, the Starbucks holiday cup has been red with a variety of holiday designs. This year, however, Starbucks decided to pursue a fresh

new design and feature a cup that was solid red. Together with its ubiquitous green logo, it made for a very festive, if not minimalist, holiday nod.

According to the Starbucks' vice president of design and content, " This year we wanted to usher in the holidays with a purity of design that welcomes all of our stories."

Unfortunately, not everyone was so happy about the design, and Starbucks quickly got chastised on social media, accused of being overly politically correct and aiming to destroying Christmas. As the dissent proliferated, the issue also gave rise to as many Starbucks supporters, or at least enough people to express their apathy toward the issue.

It seemed as unimportant, yet as widely talked about, as the famous blue-dress debate.

And while " Red Cup Gate" will probably -- and hopefully -- fade fast, the entire affair provided a few valuable lessons for entrepreneurs.

1. Yes, all PR is good PR.

With a market cap of \$92 billion, Starbucks is not what you call a small company. When you consider the company added \$1.4 billion dollars to its gift and loyalty card platform this time last year, it's clear that it has ample resources for marketing. The company employs some of the industry's most creative marketers who clearly deliberated and understood the potential ramifications of this new campaign. So why would they undertake such a campaign if they knew it would get such a negative response?

Simple: Doing so turns millions of people into marketers and publishers.

Consider the fact that Ellen Degeneres, Trevor Noah and Stephen Colbert chimed in on issue. That is amazing PR you can't even pay for.

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Entrepreneurs understand that visibility of a business is key to success, and when you can garner that visibility with little effort or expense, even better. While some PR can be bad, talented and creative entrepreneurs understand how to turn it into a benefit.

2. Social media is awesome.

It took very little time for this so-called controversy to spread to every corner of social media, proving once again the immense power that occurs when you combine large swaths of people with unprecedented communication tools.

For a business, understanding the power of social media and its value for establishing your brand and raising visibility should not be overlooked. While it is impossible to really predict which campaigns will go viral or when, it should be clear that a well-planned digital and social-media strategy is key for success in today's business environment.

3. Opportunities abound for opportunists.

While issues such as "Red Cup Gate" burn their wick of relevance rather quickly, entrepreneurs with the creativity and willingness to act fast can take advantage of these situations. Much like how brands jumped on the blue-dress buzz, other coffee brands got a boost from the issue, such as Dunkin

Donuts with its holiday cup release. The subject has also created opportunities for small companies, YouTubers and creative types alike to ride the wave and get attention.

So whether you are offended by Starbucks' holiday-cup campaign or found it to be an utter waste of valuable real estate on your Facebook feed, it is important for entrepreneurs to understand that this is how information and news gets proliferated these days -- through tens of millions of people chatting about it on social media. More important, in addition to being prepared, successful entrepreneurs of tomorrow will know how to take advantage of this.

Now, back to my pumpkin spice latte in my pagan idol-adorned satin-sipper cup. Cheers.

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