

3 lessons from brand missteps in responsible AI content marketing

Article

It takes time to learn a new technology and sometimes, along the way, stumbles happen. As the role of AI in marketing grows, brands must be transparent about how, where, and when they are using the technology. Nearly half (49%) of CMOs in North America plan to focus more on using AI in strategy, creative, and content development for media use over the next 12 months, according to an August 2023 Dentsu survey conducted by B2B International.

Here are three missteps brands have made with AI and content creation and what brands can learn from them.

1. Instacart paints a not-so-pretty picture

In January, a user on the Instacart subreddit noted that the [images Instacart was using](#) alongside some of its recipes were a bit strange.

- One image showed two cooked chickens conjoined at the shoulder. Another featured a hot dog with the interior texture of a tomato.
- The recipes themselves were also created by AI, with some similarly baffling results like “Hot Dog Stir Fry.”

Instacart did publicly disclose that the recipes and images were generated by AI, but it also removed some of the AI-generated images quietly, replacing them with generic stock photos.

The lesson: Even with a disclaimer, brands should not put unreviewed text, images, or video generated by AI on a public site or app. If they’re going to rely on generative AI for content, brands need to incorporate a step in the process for human review.

2. Selkie disappoints fans

Fashion brand Selkie got into some hot water after using AI to create its 2024 Valentine’s Day collection.

- In an Instagram post featuring some of the pieces, users noted that one design featured a dog with one too many toes.
- Selkie confirmed it created the images for the collection using “vintage art, AI, and computer painting,” and acknowledged that though AI is controversial, the company “loves the future of AI.”

The brand’s endorsement of AI was met with some criticism, with many consumers expressing disappointment that the company leveraged AI instead of investing in creators.

The lesson: Consumers are still sensitive to the use of AI in creative spaces and it could have an impact on a brand’s reputation. While consumer wariness of AI probably won’t last forever, brands should tread carefully in the short term.

3. Under Armour doesn't tell the full story

Under Armour also faced backlash after promoting its “first AI-powered sports commercial” on Instagram.

- “Under Armour asked us to build a film from nothing but existing assets, a 3D model of Anthony Joshua, and no athlete access,” wrote director Wes Walker on the post, noting the whole process took just three weeks.
- However, the ad features a film shot by André Chemetoff and directed by Gustav Johansson, neither of whom were credited in the original post.

Johansson and other creatives were quick to point out that Walker’s film was not built from “nothing,” but rather from many existing pieces of content, which helped contribute to the project’s cost and time savings.

The lesson: AI is a valuable tool for marketers to save time and money, but it’s a slippery slope when intellectual property is involved. Brands should err on the safe side, obtaining consent and providing credit where it’s due.

You can just say no: Brands don’t have to hop on every new technology, especially if it doesn’t mesh with their core values. But, if brands do want to experiment, they should always keep consumers at the center of their strategies.

Earlier this month, Dove vowed to never use AI in place of real people in its advertising and introduced the Real Beauty Prompt Guidelines, which provide brands and consumers with guidance on how to create images that are more representative of “real” consumers.

- The brand is promoting this stance with a new campaign, titled “The Code,” which shows the impact that AI can have on how consumers view themselves.
- In addition to being consistent with the brand’s mission to create a more inclusive beauty standard, taking a stance on AI may win Dove some points with consumers who are wary of the technology.

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