

## **SPIRIT AIRLINES: COULD PROMOTIONAL EXPOSURE GO TOO FAR**

**Dr. Bradley W. Brooks, Queens University of Charlotte**

**Dr. Steven M. Cox, Queens University of Charlotte**

**Dr. Zachary M. White, Queens University of Charlotte**

### **SYNOPSIS**

Spirit Airlines, known for its low airfare and its controversial promotions, ran a June 2010 web promotion that instructed viewers to “Check Out the Oil on Our Beaches.” The promotion ran only a few months after an underwater oil well operated by British Petroleum (BP) had exploded, instantly killing eleven people. The April 20 explosion was continuing to destroy the livelihood of thousands of people as well as the ecology of the region as it was pouring millions of barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. Spirit’s promotions included pictures of bikini-clad women with green and yellow sunscreen bottles (BP’s colors) that included “Best Protection” on the labels such that B and P were accentuated. Outraged consumers accused Spirit of exploiting a horrific disaster for commercial purposes. Spirit Airlines faced a decision of how to respond to this public outcry regarding its potentially profitable promotion.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this case are to:

1. Contrast mutually exclusive priorities of various stakeholders when considering potential commercial advantages derived from a disaster.
2. Identify reasons for differences between the public responses of different promotional campaigns.
3. Evaluate a promotional campaign using the AIDA model.
4. Analyze the implications of an ethical marketing decision regarding potentially offensive yet profitable promotional techniques.
5. Propose a recommendation for or against continuing a potentially profitable promotional campaign that is perceived as offensive by a significant percentage of the population.

### **APPLICATION**

This case study is appropriate both for graduate and for undergraduate courses in marketing, in marketing ethics, in promotion management, or in ethics and social responsibilities.

### **KEY WORDS**

AIDA model, marketing ethics, promotion

### **CONTACT**

Dr. Bradley Brooks, Queens University of Charlotte, McColl School of Business, Charlotte, North Carolina 28274, phone: 704-337-2326, email: [BrooksB@Queens.edu](mailto:BrooksB@Queens.edu)