

A Winthrop & Weinstine blog dedicated to bridging the gap between legal & marketing types.

## Lacking Credibility

December 21, 2011 by [Steve Baird](#)

I'll have to say, I really enjoyed [Aaron Keller's guest post from yesterday](#). In addition to the valuable insights he provided, it got me thinking about some perhaps unrelated, but parallel topics of likely interest to legal and marketing types.

Aaron wrote about the importance of a brand being honest with itself and others. He expressed the need for truth in brand messaging. Puffery leads to less trust in a brand. Less trust leads to less loyalty. His call to action was for more people to demand the truth for the brands in our lives. He concluded by asking whether your brand might be stretching the truth and whether it is living up to the brand's implied and explicit promises.

Similarly, as Anthony Shore of [Operative Words](#) wrote before here on DuetsBlog, ["truth is stronger than fiction" in brands](#).

Now, without putting words in Aaron's or Anthony's mouth, I'd sum it up by using a word they didn't and saying: *credibility* is the key.

I can think of a few other examples where the absence of credibility leads to other kinds of negative consequences and, in some cases, bad behavior.

On the subject of bad behavior, [Alec Baldwin recently received a lot of media attention](#) over being kicked off an American Airlines flight for apparently not turning off an electronic device when told to do so by a flight attendant. Although I've never been close to being kicked off a flight, I'll have to admit I harbor a healthy dose of skepticism in the repetitive, but [unsupported claim](#) that electronic devices risk flight safety by interfering with flight navigation and aircraft instruments. Apparently, [I'm not alone](#).

Most recently, the Christian Science Monitor had this to say on the subject:

"Although many passengers are skeptical that using electronic devices can threaten air safety, some travel experts say the industry has good reason for its protocols on the use of cellphones and similar devices.



Geoff Thomas, editor of Air Transport World magazine, tells an Australian arm of [ABC News](#) that glitches appear to be 'exceedingly random,' but that there's 'enough evidence to suggest that it is a problem' that can interfere with aircraft instruments."

That's it, this was the end of the article that began this way: "Others say there is a reason for the protocol on 'shutting off' electronic devices." So, I was anxiously reading, hoping for more enlightenment in this article than a flight attendant on duty probably has time to provide, instead just more platitudes.

To quote Aaron in another context, [really?](#) Yeah, I'd like to see the evidence or at least something other than conclusory statements on the subject of signal interference. Without more substance or explanation, passenger skepticism is fueled, and credibility is out the window without a parachute.

In fact, I'd welcome an airline brand's honesty on the subject. I'd certainly feel more trust and engender more loyalty toward an airline brand that just admits there is no conclusive evidence of a safety problem, but expresses that "we're all about safety, and we simply won't take that risk, no matter how remote, for fifteen minutes of convenience at the beginning and end of a flight."

There, I'd believe it, I'd trust it, and I'd stop questioning and being annoyed by the rote words surrounding purported signal interference.

And being worthy of trust is a wonderful thing for a brand, especially an airline brand, because I might even start believing some of the answers given to other common passenger questions like why I can't place my room-temperature laptop in the seat pocket in front of me, or why a flight is late, delayed, sitting on the runway, or eventually canceled.

Last but not least, it's time for trademark types to examine their personal brands and look in the mirror on the issue of credibility in assessing risk. [As I have written before](#), there is a new breed of marketer -- the type that expects much more from their trademark counsel than reciting all the trademark do's and don'ts without being cross-examined on how realistic the risks might be of disregarding or not following some or all of the advice.

My growing sense is that in these increasingly competitive times, [marketers want to probe previously unquestioned trademark use guidelines](#) that forever have forbidden any brand or trademark use beyond that of an adjective. They are especially interested in [knowing how realistic the risk of genericide is](#) if they were to "[verb](#)" their particular brand. Moreover, they aren't interested in following black and white rules that unnecessarily straight-jacket their creativity. Ever wonder why Google uses no trademark registration notice on their [homepage](#)?

Trademark types, are we ready to address the [true risk of genericide](#) and other so-called risks on a case by case basis and then [work feverishly to help mitigate](#) whatever that risk might be?

