

CoffeeTalk



#CrisisCommunications

Officials with the Bradenton Area Convention & Visitors Bureau spent some time recently recovering from a bout of the oopsies.

The root of the issue: The agency sponsored the rally towels the NHL's Pittsburgh Penguins handed out to fans before the first game of the Eastern Conference finals against the Tampa Bay Lightning May 13 played in Pittsburgh. The bureau's logo and website, and its core destinations, including Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key, lined the bottom of the black and yellow towel.

In hockey terms, the pro-Penguins towel giveaway put the CVB in the penalty box. Lightning fans made sure of that, via social media, with a #BoycottBradenton movement that trended after the game — a 3-1 Lightning victory. Tweets included this one, from BoltsJolts, an unofficial team blog: "Let's show @visit Bradenton who they gave the finger to with that statement. Get it trending higher. #BoycottBradenton."

Bradenton CVB officials were blindsided by the backlash. No one in the office considered the promotion, which cost \$6,000 for 20,000 towels for the one game, a significant risk.

The CVB released a statement the day after the social media onslaught. Elliott Falcione, executive director of the CVB,

mentioned the Bradenton area's deep roots with Pittsburgh, particularly with the Pirates holding spring training in town for years. The CVB's towel sponsorship, he says, was a marketing move, not a dig against the Lightning.

With the negative stories still streaming over the weekend, Falcione held a brief press conference May 16. He says the Pens reached out to him with the advertising opportunity and needed an answer, quickly. Getting the logo and brand awareness into the hands of thousands of potential visitors, says Falcione, was a no-brainer — he thought.

Asked specifically about the social media firestorm, Falcione says it was a mistake that he "didn't think it all the way through." But while he says he wouldn't do something like this again, he and the CVB will remain aggressive in courting visitors and sticking to the mission of promoting tourism. "I believe in what we do, but we make mistakes because we take risks," he says. "But we won't make the same mistake twice."

Falcione didn't address another social media happening: The people who say all of this is a whole bunch of nothing. Such as this tweet: "Plenty of things in this world worthy of outrage. The #BoycottBradenton is by far one of the dumbest."

Become a net promoter

Everyone knows word of mouth is often the best form of advertising.

In a conference call with analysts to discuss the most recent positive quarterly earnings, NeoGenomics CEO Douglas VanOort says the Fort Myers-based company measures how likely its customers are to promote the cancer-testing lab's services.

"We measure something called the net promoter score," VanOort says on a transcript of the call posted on SeekingAlpha.com. "Many of our clients rated us very, very highly and are essentially promoters of our service. So good service leads to word-of-mouth referrals in some respects."

That's important because the cancer-testing world is close-knit. "In this business, it really is about delivering consistently every single day good service to clients and when that happens, not only do you retain clients, but this is a small community," VanOort says.

Word of mouth can also be effective when prospecting for new customers. "Increasingly we're getting work not only from pathology groups but from hospitals, oncology groups, academic centers, research centers and others," VanOort notes.

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NO WORKERS. NO WORK

The crisis level shortage in skilled labor for construction and related fields is whacking companies in a painful place: the sales ledger.

Daryl Blume, president of Largo-based BCH Mechanical Inc., a plumbing/piping, sheet metal and HVAC contractor, says his firm recently turned away a few jobs. Most of the requests, Blume tells Coffee Talk, came from general contractors on projects more than halfway complete but lacked properly trained personnel to finish the job. BCH couldn't spare any employees.

A 40-year-old firm with \$98 million in sales last year, BCH Mechanical is in better position

than most to pass up work. Current projects include a hotel on Clearwater Beach; the USF St. Petersburg business school; and a large expansion for Lakeland Regional Medical Center.

But Blume, who has been with the firm for 36 years, says the labor shortage remains his constant No. 1 challenge. The company has 50 open positions, from plumbers and pipefitters to inside office work. He says BCH will only bid on work it's confident it can do right, with the right internal labor supply, without compromising quality. Says Blume: "We are in a market where we have to be able to say no."

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