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# The Pratfall Effect

## ... and why your customers could like your mistakes

The English certainly have a way with words. There's a four-letter word which has so much meaning behind it and is used effectively in the English language to describe so much meaning. That word is 'prat'. It's a demeaning word used to describe someone who has done something really stupid, as in ... "He looked a right prat in that silly cowboy hat."

And most people like to see prats get taken down.

Since this is a column about delighting your customers and not English grammar, let me move on to why I brought it up. In the world of consumer psychology, there is a wonderful phenomenon called The Pratfall Effect. It states that, "people who are considered highly competent are found to be more likeable when they perform an everyday blunder than those who don't."

There have been quite a few studies of this and one of the first was done by psychologist Elliot Aronson in the 1960s. Aronson wondered if who were considered 'superior' by others could become more appealing upon committing a small pratfall – because it allows us to see them as more human, and therefore to like them more.

So he set up an experiment in which some top-quality, almost untouchable leaders, would boast about their achievements, and then either stop

by simply staying quiet on the subject. But as the old adage goes, "fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

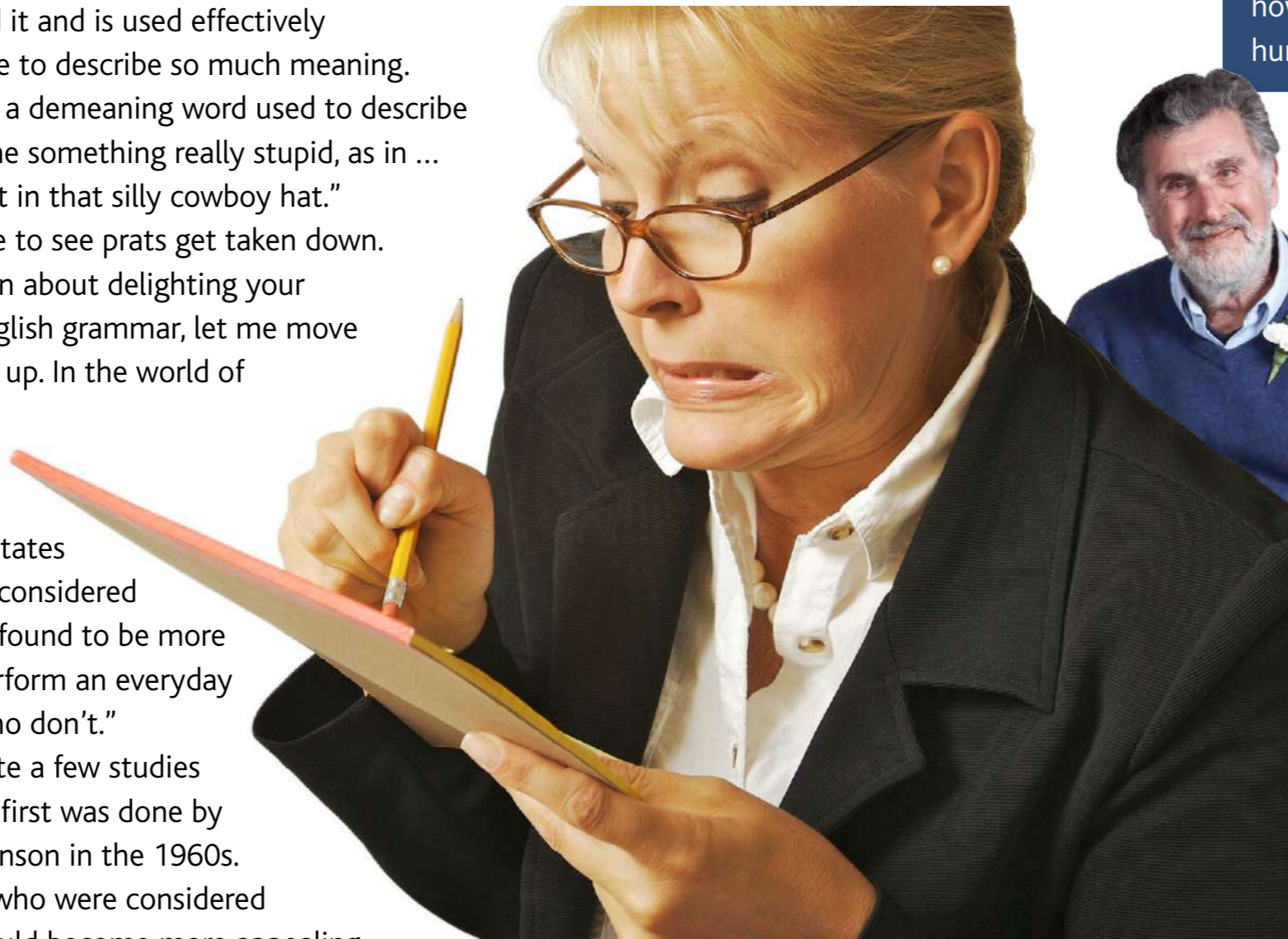
This is the next article in a series on how behavioural economics and 'being human' affects your business.

Professor  
Elliot Aronson

talking or, right the end, with the sound of clattering of cups and cutlery, dropped coffee all over themselves and said, "Oh my goodness, I've spilled coffee all over my new suit." People were then

asked to rate, among other things, the likeability of these two leaders. And yes, you guessed it right ... those people considered superior were found to be more likeable if they had committed a blunder.

After all the controversies both in the USA and SA over LGBTQIA+ rights, one would think that businesses would avoid scandals







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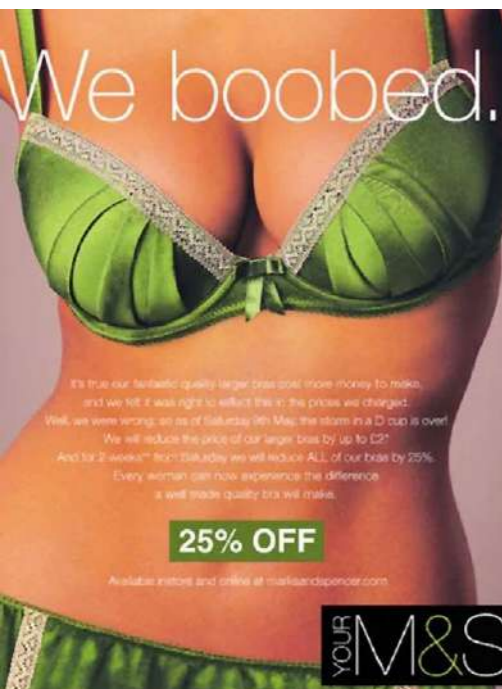




The question now is, what should a company do when it's opened up Pandora's Box? It's always tempting to try to hide your mistakes as a brand. Being perfect is the best way to get people to buy, right? If you believe that, you are just plain wrong. Or you have been given bad advice by lawyers.

The Pratfall Effect demonstrates that customers and members of the public actually like it more when people (and brands) show their flaws. And we've seen a couple of great examples.

For example, when Marks and Spencer in the UK



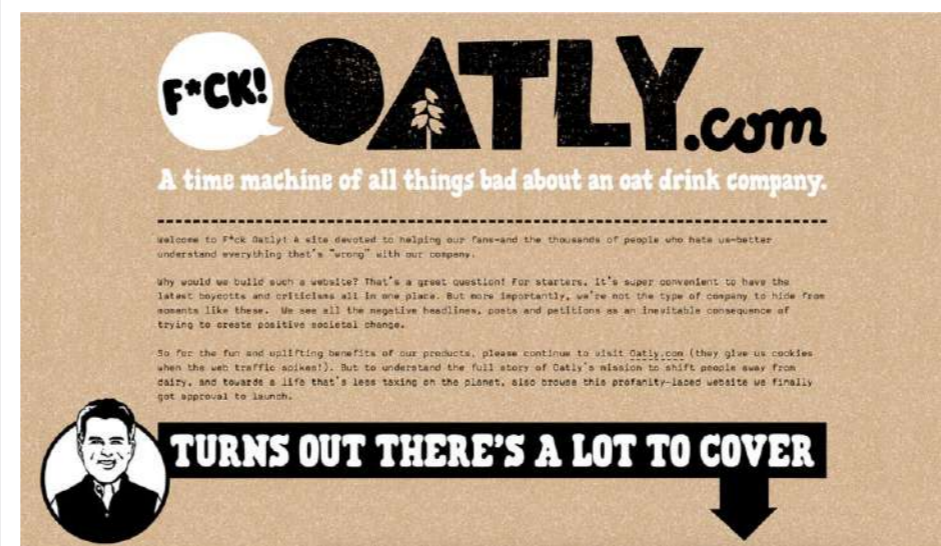
decided to charge a £2 additional surcharge for larger sized bras, there was, understandably, a big national outcry. To their credit, M&S almost immediately reversed their decision and took out full-page advertising in major newspapers saying, "We Boobed!"

In another UK example, in 2018 KFC in the UK ran out of chicken. (How can you run out of chicken when your primary products is chicken? It's like a pizza shop saying they've run out of dough.) Nevertheless, after some half-hearted, "We suffered from supply chain issues," which led to really negative sentiment and media coverage, the brand was in crisis and the fast food chain and its

advertising agency dragged victory from the jaws of defeat, again, with full-page adverts which



showed a KFC Bucket with the initials somewhat reversed to read "FCK." Below this was copy that read, "We're Sorry. A chicken restaurant without any chicken. It's not ideal. Huge apologies to our customers..."



Another oat-milk drinks, yoghurt and ice-cream company in the USA, Oatly, also messed up by selling a 10% stake in their company to Blackstone. Why was this controversial? Because they claimed to be environmentally friendly in all their advertis-

ing (for example, "One gallon of oat milk produces far less greenhouse gasses than cow's milk"), but Blackstone is a company that is partly responsible for the deforestation of the Amazon forests and is a great supporter of Donald Trump.

So what they did was start a new website called FCKOatly.com, and turned it into what they called "a time machine of all things bad about an oat drink company." Once again they used this to apologise and to create respectful discussion of their mistake. Surveys showed that this created trust and reliability by making buyers feel like they're willing to flaunt their flaws — not to hide them.

Image courtesy of Teddy O, Unsplash



Contrast that firstly with the fact that the company embroiled in the LGBTQIA+ controversy





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The International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) is the largest and most diverse international association serving the global fresh produce and floral supply chain. The association is the combination of the Produce Marketing Association (PMA, founded in 1949) and the United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA, founded in 1904).







In the spirit of full transparency, I have to say that I completely agree that ...

“ ... we need a world of greater acceptance and compassion, and it saddens me that the debate has reached this appalling level of hate. But it is foolish to think that the problem will just go away if we ignore it. ”

We also know that another SA retailer has also lost billions in market value and turnover because of their stance on BEE.

“ Nobody ever said that your customers would be reasonable and rational, and if you don't take that into consideration, expect to pay a very high price. So, your best strategy is to avoid getting embroiled in debates which alienate people, but if you do, then you need to remember that the only strategy that will work for you is the Pratfall Effect. ”

And as a footnote, I'd also like to share with you another of Aronson's findings in his experiment. There was also another group of 'actors' that were tested. These were not superior experts, but rather people who admitted that they were pretty 'average' said that they had always made



doesn't even address their stance or the resulting customer rebellion, on their website. And secondly, they have issued a handful of bland media statements that neither acknowledge the fact that there are customers and staff offended by their stance ... and trying to justify it with words like, "The [XYZ Initiative] sets out to acknowledge that certain groups in society are marginalised, and to help shape a world in which everyone feels they belong. We certainly see a world characterised by rising levels of inequality, discrimination and marginalisation, and we believe that we have a responsibility to use the platform we have as a business to make a broader contribution to the world around us."

average grades at school, and admitted that they had never really excelled at anything.

They then also went into the whole Pratfall performance of spilling coffee over their suit, and were rated by the observers for likeability. Aronson discovered that their likeability decreased upon committing the same gaffe.



Image courtesy of <https://www.sv-sachsen.de/> SR



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Serves: 4  
Preparation time: 25 minutes  
Cooking time: 50 minutes

## GOLDI, COUNTY FAIR, FESTIVE or MOUNTAIN VALLEY Chicken Thighs

### INGREDIENTS

#### Chicken:

30ml ghee or sunflower oil  
8 chicken thighs  
1 large onion, chopped  
5ml paprika  
2,5ml turmeric  
2,5ml ground cinnamon  
50ml pomegranate molasses  
200ml chicken stock  
80g walnuts, pounded with a pestle and mortar until coarsely ground

#### Jewelled rice:

500ml basmati rice, cooked  
40ml ghee or butter  
1 onion, chopped  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
2,5ml ground cumin  
2,5ml turmeric  
a pinch of cinnamon  
5ml honey  
salt and pepper  
100ml cranberries or sultanas  
60ml pistachios, chopped  
125ml pomegranate rubies  
fresh coriander and parsley

## PERSIAN CHICKEN BAKE WITH JEWELLED RICE

This Persian chicken dish is packed with wonderful flavours that are set to wow your dinner guests.

#### Method:

Preheat the oven to 200°C.

Heat the ghee or oil in an ovenproof casserole on medium heat. Brown the chicken on both sides. Season and remove from the casserole.

Add the onion and cook until softened. Add the spices, pomegranate molasses, stock and walnuts, and bring to the boil. Add the chicken back into the casserole. Place in the oven for about 40 minutes until cooked through (the sauce should have thickened). Taste and adjust the seasoning, if necessary. Serve with the jewelled rice (see below), fresh parsley and coriander.

#### To make the jewelled rice:

Heat the ghee or butter in a large frying pan and cook the onion and garlic until soft and golden brown. Add the rice, spices, honey and cranberries. Allow to cook for a few minutes to allow the flavours to develop. Add the pistachios and pomegranate rubies and serve with the chicken.



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Serves: 4  
Preparation time: 60 minutes  
Cooking time: 30 minutes

## GOLDI or COUNTY FAIR Chicken Livers

### INGREDIENTS

#### Chicken:

250g chicken livers  
60ml oil  
1 can chopped tomato  
1 onion, sliced  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
1 tsp chilli flakes  
salt and pepper

#### Amagwinya:

3 cups flour  
10g yeast  
1 tbsp salt  
2 tbsp sugar  
2 tbsp oil  
375ml warm water  
1,5–2 litres oil for deep frying

## AMAGWINYA WITH TOMATO-AND-ONION CHICKEN LIVERS

An easy, affordable snack that's perfect for some summer entertaining.

#### Method:

Drain chicken livers and pat dry. Heat half the oil in a pan and fry the livers until firm (8–10 minutes). Remove livers from the pan and set aside. Add the remaining oil and lightly caramelize the onions for about 10 minutes. Add the garlic and chilli flakes and cook for 1 minute. Now add the can of tomatoes and a pinch of salt, and simmer for 5 minutes until reduced. Once the tomato-and-onion mixture has thickened, add the livers. Serve with amagwinya.

#### Amagwinya:

Combine all the dry ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients and add the warm water and oil. Slowly combine the mixture until it forms a dough. Knead on a lightly floured surface for 10 minutes, until the dough is smooth and bounces back when gently pressed. Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover, and leave in a warm place to rise for 40 minutes. Knock air out of the dough and divide into golf-sized balls. In a saucepan, heat the oil. To test when the oil is ready, dip a wooden spoon in the oil. It's ready when small bubbles appear around the spoon. Add 3–4 amagwinya to the saucepan. Don't overcrowd the pan and cook for 4 minutes, until golden in colour. Remove from oil. Drain.

Serve with tomato-and-onion chicken livers.



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