

Declaration of WAR

A reasoned declaration of war justifies the resort to war by stating the grievances that have made peace intolerable and the remedies that will restore peace. – Wikipedia :)

Taco Bell,

In anticipation of the 5th Birthday of the Beefy Crunch Burrito coming up on 12.20.15, along with the latest intel we have that any future promotion is dependent upon the success of the test promotion in Louisville, KY and it now being over 820+ days since the last Nationwide Release of the Beefy Crunch Burrito, we hereby formally and justifiably enter a state of Social Media War.

You will find our grievances detailed in the following report but in short, we are tired of waiting, tired of jumping through hoops and tired of a seemingly double standard when it comes to our place on the social media battlefield. This community of 23K+ whose passion and willingness to work together has not wavered in the last 4 and half years has to mean something. At least more than what we have received.

Our terms for a cessation of hostilities are simple, and the duration and magnitude of this war are entirely in your hands. Just bring back the Beefy Crunch Burrito. We continue to respect the complexity and the challenges of such a task and are not expecting this to happen overnight. It's one of the reasons we have waited relatively patiently for so long.

As the representative of the Beefy Crunch Movement I remind you that channels of communication continue to be wide open and I still offer an olive branch for collaboration. A cease-fire is seconds away at any moment, all you have to do is reach out to us. All you have to do is talk to us.

May this war be brief, and may we come out the other side stronger on both sides, and hopefully united!

Richard

Why we are at war with Taco Bell



Why we are at War with Taco Bell.

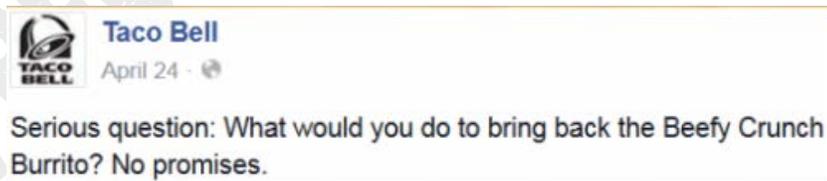
For those who have been with the Beefy Crunch Movement from the beginning, or even as early as August 2013 when the last nationwide promotion ended, Operation #AnnoyingAF comes as a completely justified course of action and natural response to the events seen over the last 820 days. For those who are just joining, bombarding Taco Bell's Facebook page may seem immature, counter-productive, and be wishing for a more reasoned approach that addresses the reasons why it is not on the menu. If you bear with me throughout this report, you will find that we have done **just that**.

There are two (2) main reasons why this war started. The other factors that come in to play will be discussed shortly.

1. The fate of the next nationwide Beefy Crunch Burrito promotion is to be determined by the results of a "test promotion" in the Louisville, KY and surrounding areas earlier this year.
2. Tressie Lieberman, VP of Digital Innovation at Taco Bell was a faculty contributor to an online "Social Media Marketing Specialization" course and in one of her lessons revealed that Taco Bell has social media "War Room" to listen to what is going in their social channels.

Let's start with the Louisville, KY test promotion.

In May/June of 2015, Taco Bell ran a regional test of what they called the "Throwback Burrito" promotion. There was no official announcement of the test, but they did post on Facebook and Twitter in April regarding the Beefy Crunch Burrito. There was a lot of excitement surrounding this post, because after waiting 630 days since the last promotion, Taco Bell finally engaged with the Beefy Crunch fans on social media, asking us what we'd do to bring it back.



The reason this brought much excitement was because in 2013, they asked the exact same question just a month before they did a nationwide rollout of the Beefy Crunch. In hindsight, it appears we got a little too eager because maybe we all just assumed this was an indication it was coming back. Once the first sightings were spotted and our page went crazy with anticipation, Taco Bell HQ called to inform me that this was not going to be nationwide. That

Why we are at war with Taco Bell

wasn't the only bombshell. I was told that there was to be no marketing other than local TV ads and that the possible nationwide release of the Beefy Crunch would depend on this test run. The ads they were airing featured stunts performed by real life Beefy Crunch fans who had answered their question back in April. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7ni9GBxSzA> That was pretty much it.

To keep this post brief, I'll refer you to a letter that we wrote to Taco Bell in August to mark two years since the end of the last promotion. It described the efforts our community made to help make the promotion a success, including raising money for a GoFundMe-funded, LIVE Periscope Beefy Crunch Burrito giveaway campaign in Louisville to help spread awareness thanks to our Louisville resident and amazingly talented Beefy Crunch advocate Phillip as seen here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCnB186F7-o> Fans from around the country also drove thousands of miles in road-trips just so they could get their hands on a taste that has survived the passage of time and still draws us to do crazy things. You can read the full letter here: <http://beefy crunchmovement.com/letter-to-taco-bell-2015/>

In September, I made contact with HungryDads.com and they were so fascinated by what we were doing, I was invited to do a Podcast with them to discuss the Beefy Crunch Movement. We chatted for a good 2 hours but had to edit it down to a more manageable 30 minutes. Featured in the podcast was Phillip who talked about his Periscope giveaway. It was here he explained that the advertisements made no reference that this was a local-only promotion and that the rest of the country was depending on them.

This was devastating information for me, because I had always contrasted this test promotion to that of the Quesalupa earlier this year in which Taco Bell had a huge social media campaign, bought billboards and managed to get a plug on Conan. A huge part of the marketing focused on the fact that "If Toledo (Ohio) doesn't like it, America can't have it." Or words to that effect.

As the person who has managed this Facebook page from the start, I can't help but see the different level of commitment from Taco Bell. Why does the potential success of the Quesalupa have the home field advantage of a nationwide media campaign whereas the Beefy Crunch has only the crutch of a TV commercial?

I appreciate that there may be issues with bringing back the Beefy Crunch, but how come this burrito is the only one I can think of that has rolled out nationally 3 times and then now has to go back to testing? I mean, am I wrong? What other item has had to go back to testing despite having a loyal and passionate community 15,000K strong (at the time)?

You've heard our first reason, now hear our second and most compelling.

While the testing in Louisville did not sit well with me, I had no plan for the "war" until I found out Tressie Lieberman was going to tell us all about Taco Bell's "War Room." As I said before, this was only part of a Social Media Marketing Specialization course, and I'll go into the other things I learned later on.



I can't share the full videos of her interview, but the following quotes, all from Lieberman, I feel, put our entire movement and this latest campaign into context.

When asked why they had an internal newsroom/war room as opposed to using outside agencies, her response was as follows.

*"One of the key reasons that we brought the news room in house is because we wanted to be able to **move fast**, but we also have people who work here who really care about the brand. **They are connected to the conversation and they are listening 24/7**. So when an opportunity did happen, they were able to jump on it and create content that would really connect with the community that they are tapped into."*

If they are truly connected to the conversation, then when we control it, they have to be aware of our level of dissatisfaction. Our memes and repeated hashtags are our latest efforts to be heard because waiting patiently, or writing letters of collaboration seem to get you nowhere these days.

*"The cool thing about social is **every single day** you have an opportunity to create something and get it out there in the world. You're not working for nine months on a big*

Why we are at war with Taco Bell

campaign, and unveiling the campaign, and then hoping that you get a great response. You're able to get something out there and get a response immediately."

It's been over 820 days in which I count only 2 or 3 engagements with the Beefy Crunch fan base or our community in particular. The Christmas present to me with the bags of Fritos (awesome by the way), the Facebook post and Twitter tweet asking us what we'd do for the Beefy Crunch, and their phone call to me to give us the details for the Louisville testing. That's 817+ days of opportunities untapped. So now we will make the most out of every opportunity forthcoming that when you put something out there, we will respond immediately with our current Operation #AnnoyingAF campaign.

"...we measure every single day what's happening in the business. What do people think about that particular piece of content? How did they engage with it?"

"I don't think that we ever think about things as barriers. We've been so focused and knowing that we wanted to build this right relationship with our customers that we've just continued to attack things on a daily basis. It is a series of planning and attacking the goal daily versus just those big events. We've continued to reinforce the importance of social media with everybody in this building, I feel like everybody is kind of a part of that journey."

"A platform that is interesting today and that all of your consumers are obsessed with could be gone tomorrow or they move on to the next platform. So you really have to have your ear to the ground about what the audience is interested in. And showing up where they want to have a relationship with your brand."

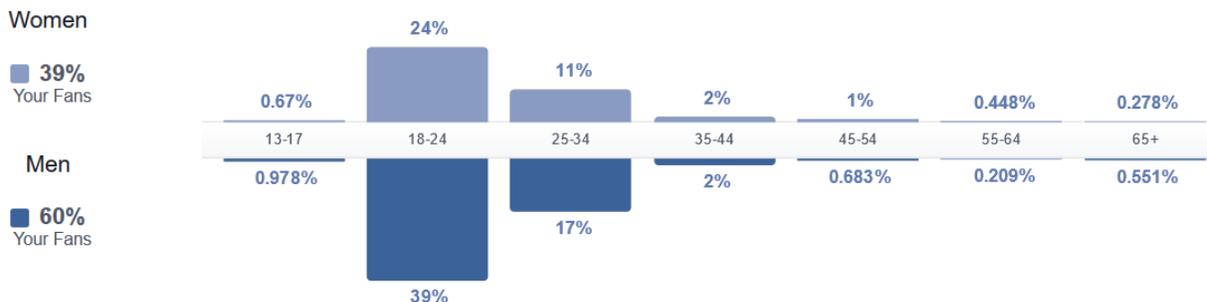
"You can talk about it forever, you can think through the right deep strategy and try and perfect it, but the best way you're going to learn is just create content, get in front of your community and make sure you're listening so that you can continue to work on how you grow in the space."

"I've been at Taco Bell for about three and a half years, and a huge part of my job when I started, was building a social strategy. And starting to evolve how we created real two way conversations with our customers. And so I'm really excited about the work we've done in a way that we have been able to really build a true friendship with our community."

Why we are at war with Taco Bell

The Beefy Crunch Movement has been active for over four and a half years since May 2011. I know Lieberman was involved in the 2013 promotion of the Beefy Crunch Burrito being released on Snapchat. She had so many awesome things to say about our social media efforts at the time. I'll come back to this later on. But two and half years later, that two way conversation never really happened again. Even the Louisville testing seemed like we were just observers of an experiment. We did our best to get involved, and I suppose getting Taco Bell to watch our Periscope can be seen as a slight victory in that regards but at the end of the day, that one sentence was all we received for all that we did. Would you define that as a two way conversation?

*"If you think about social media, I don't think that brands have a choice about showing up in social media. Especially a brand like Taco Bell, where **our core consumers are millennials**. And if we're going to be there, we have to be the best, you know. We really wanted to lead the way. And so when I came in, what we noticed was that **we had passionate fans**, so if you went to our Facebook wall, people were doing things like posting a picture of themselves with a **Taco Bell tattoo**. Or they were actually shaving the logo into their head. And coming from the outside in, I thought this is spectacular, I mean, this is gold. **I can't believe that we have fans that are this passionate about our brand**. And really at the level of something like Apple that you would expect. But Taco Bell was really driving this great cult, this amazing community of people who loved it. And we weren't tapping into that with the content we were creating. We are essentially taking advertising, and we were posting it on our page, we had legal copy. We had very long descriptions, and we were selling. We were completely selling our community. So, we flipped that on its head and said, **we need to really be engaging** as a friend. We want to be authentic, and real, and show our passion to our fans."*



91% of the fan base of the Beefy Crunch Movement is between 18 and 34 years old. Beefy Crunch fans are one of the most passionate people I have seen for a single Taco Bell item, and one of them even got a Beefy Crunch Burrito tattoo just to get it a few days early on one of the promotions. Like I said before, we've had possibly 3 'engagements' with Taco Bell in the last 820+ days. It is company statements like these that make Operation #AnnoyingAF so important.

In one of the lessons, Lieberman was asked by the interviewer 'So there's been a fair amount written about the way in which you think about social media, but how would you distill it down to the **primary goal** it's trying to achieve?'

Why we are at war with Taco Bell

"For us, it's really been about creating a relationship. I think a lot of people think about it as a sales tool, and it certainly can be a sales driver. But what we did was think about how to build a relationship first. How to be authentic. And when we're thinking about it as being a friend, if you're a friend you're not going to go to someone and say hey, buy this, right. You build a relationship over time and then when you tell your friends something's cool, they listen to you, because you have a relationship and a trust that's been established. So we wanted to develop that first, and then from there, we do talk to people about things that are going on, because they are excited about our food."

"It's not about the sales"; an answer you will see again from Lieberman in another article.

"...we felt like we knew our community well enough. And I think that's a huge advantage of being in social, is that you really get the consumers. Because you're listening to their conversations, everyday. You're really hearing what they love about the brand, and what the opportunities are. And you're able to take that feedback, and continue to change and evolve, and build new products, and build new ways to connect with that community."

Then she talked about the much acclaimed Taco emoji campaign they ran. You can replace the emoji references with "Beefy Crunch Burrito" and "other Frito Lays items" and practically be talking about us.

"Early on at Taco Bell, we were just always talking as a team about how there was no taco emoji. There was an emoji for everything else. There's 13 different clock emojis. There's a VCR emoji. People didn't even know what that is." "There was no taco emoji and it really bugged us but it also is something our consumers ask for all the time. 'Why is there no taco emoji' because people wanted to use it to express themselves. So we said well if we really care about this cause what would we do about it as a person and as a friend? And we said we have influence. Taco is a part of our name. Let's post on Change.org that we're going to have a petition for a taco emoji. So we created the petition. We posted it right around the time that Apple was talking about the latest release and how a taco was being considered for part of the update that they were going to include a taco emoji. So we actually got this petition going, and we rallied the troops. We had over 30,000 signatures and over 500 million media impressions because every time someone talked about the latest update and all the emojis that were included Taco Bell was a part of that story. So you get to get your community involved in something but also it's part of the headline."

So the idea of getting together for a common cause is not foreign to Taco Bell as they have done something just like the Beefy Crunch Movement for a cause THEY believe in.

I will always remember though the reaction on Facebook when they posted about their Taco emoji to ask for our help: <https://www.facebook.com/tacobell/posts/10153008857179697>

Why we are at war with Taco Bell

After this, Lieberman started talking about the “war room” and it was this segment that made me decide that starting a ‘war’ was the only way our movement was going to get attention.



She starts off by saying

*“The blessing of social media is that now you can have a great two way conversation with your community. But, you're also in a position where there's negative conversation around your brand. And things are not always positive, and you have to be just as prepared to **respond to the negative**, to anticipate the negative, and **to create the engaging content.**”*

*“...we are doing a real time monitoring. We're looking at impressions, conversations, comments and sentiment around the brand. And we have alerts in place to know if something starts to trend negatively. And a lot of it, beyond the tool, comes from just being **engaged in the conversation**, so you're listening to what's happening about your brand on Twitter. You're talking to your community, and you start to see something bubble up. When that happens, I think the key thing is to **get all the right people in the room**. We have a system in place where we know if something is a high alert, and **we get the team together.**”*

*“...it's really a **matter of collaborating**, and not spending a lot of time perfecting things but thinking through deeply, how you want to respond to something and creating the right conversation to hopefully nip it in the bud and not let it go any further but also **let people know the truth**. Be authentic and share what's really going on because a lot of times the story is coming from a place that maybe **isn't fully understood**. And you want to make sure that the brand is able to weigh in from your point of view.”*

Why we are at war with Taco Bell

After 800+ days and realizing that the next nationwide promotion of the Beefy Crunch Burrito depends on the results of a quietly promoted test market, I knew we had to change our approach with Taco Bell because it clearly wasn't working. This insight to crisis management from Taco Bell's perspective gave me the solution on how we were to get Taco Bell to respond to us. Obviously our attempts at positive collaboration went unfruitful so maybe instead of offering them honey, let's instead shake the bee hive of the Beefy Crunch Movement to get their attention. But this isn't in an effort to sting Taco Bell, but to draw attention and encourage engagement with a group of 23,500+ who want to have this so called two way conversation. She's right, we are coming from a place this is not fully understood.

- We have no idea why the Beefy Crunch Burrito only came back in Louisville two years after the last promotion.
- We have no idea why we had to jump through hoops and do tricks to prove to you once again how much we love the Beefy Crunch, just to get that Louisville promotion while Lava Sauce came back with no such prerequisite.
- We have no idea why the Grilled Stuff Nacho, and Triple Steak Stack among other have had two nationwide promotions in the meantime with no additional testing.

It's not difficult to see why keeping us in the dark is causing this frustration.

Those were the two main reasons why this war has started, but these were just a catalyst for a growing frustration that was being built by actions from Taco Bell over the last 820 days. This is more for those new to the Movement who may not be aware of these events, but is a great reminder of why our war is justified and the foundation it is built upon. These are no particular order.

Let's start with the first a huge bruise on the Beefy Crunch Movement, given to us by Taco Bell in March this year in their advertisement of the Sriracha Quesarito. In their commercial, the Beefy Crunch Burrito tattoo was used in the fast paced sequence of 'Sriracha maniacs' to whom they were credited for Taco Bell introducing this item. There was outrage from Beefy Crunch fans who saw the commercial and thought it was back. We never did get a response of why they let this get through the screening process to television screens. You can view the commercial here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IUZ_0h9FXI

Why we are at war with Taco Bell

Throughout the years they have brought back several past limited time only items. The Grilled Stuft Nacho, the Triple Steak Stack, Bacon Club Chalupa, Doubledilla (or Cantina Steak Quesadilla as it was called previously) are some of the notable ones that have come back and they have no real movements or top comments on Facebook. Lava Sauce was the next contender to the Beefy Crunch in terms of demand to return, and while they didn't have a community like ours, they were tough competition for the top comments, and notably stole the spotlight on Taco Bells post about the Beefy Crunch Burrito. Taco Bell decided to listen and brought it back. To promote the comeback of Lava Sauce, Taco Bell went back on Twitter and Facebook to respond to requests old and new asking for its return. In one particular case, a twitter follower asked what he would have to do to bring it back, to which they replied, "nothing." As you can see here:



While I am happy for the lava sauce fans in that they did get what they were asking for, it only reiterates the feeling of being ignored seeing that they literally walked right past our community to talk to individuals and that we were doing more stunts for a test promotion while they were getting a nationwide release.

But sometimes words can be just as powerful as actions, and in 2014 and 2015 Taco Bell said a lot of things that clashed with our movement. From the little things like the "You asked, we delivered" when promoting their response to the "number one request" of Taco Bell delivery, to interviews with people at the very top like the CEO of Taco Bell. Reading and listening to these testimonials just highlights the almost seemingly hypocritical stance towards the Beefy Crunch Movement.

"What we've really spent our time on is understanding the insights, and what motivates and engages them, what stokes their passion."

– **Brian Niccol, CEO, Taco Bell.** June 2015

– <http://fortune.com/video/2015/06/26/taco-bells-millennial-menu/>

"In today's industry, everyone is trained to find the "right" answer that they are afraid to do something different. I've got a team that knows, should they come up with the wrong answer,

I'm with them and we've all learned something. It's an adage I've cultivated with my children, too: "It's not about being perfect. It's about giving it a try."

– **Brian Niccol, CEO**, Taco Bell. August 2015

– <http://www.gsrmagazine.com/start-finish-what-inspires-execs/start-finish-brian-niccol>

"Building up our social presence over the last three and a half years is something I am really proud of. Our social has never been about driving sales, it has been about driving that relationship."

– **Tressie Lieberman, Vice President, Digital Innovation and On Demand**, Taco Bell. September 2015

– <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/she-reinvented-taco-bells-brand-ignoring-all-her-peers-fairchild>

"The only pressure we have... is from the consumer. The consumer evolves, and the consumer changes, and as long as you are listening to that consumer, then you shouldn't feel pressure from other people... because if I'm doing right by the consumer then it's going to work."

– **Chris Brandt, Chief Marketing Officer**, Taco Bell. July 2015

– <http://www.forbes.com/video/4334516481001/>

At the end of the day, Lieberman said, "Being focused on the consumer is what it's all about," and the brand has "a lot of deep love for the customer." Further, an obsession with customers means brands don't even need fancy analytics tools, but can instead simply **search for hashtags on social platforms to "really get to know customers,"** she added. "We're focused on them. It all goes back to why we're here."

An excerpt from **The Taco Bell Guide To Social Media Dominance** – April 2015

<http://www.momentology.com/6249-social-media-strategy-taco-bell/>

The Beefy Crunch Burrito isn't like any other menu item at Taco Bell. It has its own devoted following of fans who are so obsessed, they've created social movements to keep it in market. So when we finally brought the burrito back, we didn't want fans to thank us, we wanted them to thank the obsessed...The Beefy Crunch Burrito is Taco Bell's most obsessed-over, limited-time menu item.

May 2013

http://industry.shortyawards.com/nominee/6th_annual/5g/beefy-crunch-burrito-snapchat

Why we are at war with Taco Bell

Tressie Lieberman, director of social and digital for Taco Bell, says the brand has been “blown away” by the response it has gotten on Snapchat. Taco Bell is using the app to reintroduce the Beefy Crunch Burrito. “People are obsessed with Beefy Crunch Burrito so Snapchat seemed like the right platform to make the announcement,” she says. “Sharing that story on Snapchat is a fun way to connect with the fans that we are thrilled to have. It’s all about treating them like personal friends and not consumers.”

May 2013

<http://mashable.com/2013/05/01/taco-bell-joins-snapchat/>

It wasn't just Tressie's part in the Social Media Marketing course that justifies this war. In the first few weeks, everything I was learning about how to succeed with Social Media was validating everything we have been doing.



From explaining how virtual communities are the places brands should be engaging and listening with to an assignment reading this manifesto predicting communities like ours and their importance, the Beefy Crunch Movement could have been the perfect show-and-tell example of what brands should be looking for when it comes to real, authentic engagement with their target audience. I mean just READ this.

<http://cluetrain.com/cluetrain.pdf>

You can read my analysis of these early lessons on the following link:

<http://beefy crunchmovement.com/social-media-marketing-course-lesson-one-review/>

Let the record show we have TRIED to be different from the other “bring it back” efforts out there online. We don't have the celebrity influence to fund or direct a movement to incredible scales like we saw with the Crystal Pepsi Movement. We don't have the nostalgia value nor the history or sheer numbers that make something like the Surge Movement resonate with hundreds of thousands of people. We are a community built from the ground up started by a regular Taco Bell customer with a love for a particular burrito that has grown into what you see today over the last four and a half years. We wrote letters like this one:

<http://beefy crunchmovement.com/our-first-letter/> where we acknowledged to Taco Bell that we know there are financial difficulties that face the Beefy Crunch, and we were willing to address these head on by providing suggestions on how to make them more profitable for the company. Changes to the way they prepared the burritos, price increase, promo deals with the drinks to increase profit margins and investments in social media efforts like ours to increase

Why we are at war with Taco Bell

and keep demand, these were our gestures of good will and reasoned intentions to come together to find a solution.

While other online campaigns like Surge bought billboards, we brought flags to help spread awareness but to also symbolize the real life passion this movement exhibits. That this love for the burrito goes beyond our mobile phones and computers.

It's not as though we haven't tried to avoid war, but circumstances are forcing us to react in stronger ways because ultimately this page has to mean something and I'd rather it mean something positive toward Taco Bell than to be forever a Scarlet letter of a unique and large group of fans whose passion was thwarted simply because their wallets weren't big enough. I want others to feel like they can create a page like ours and be hopeful that with the same kind of commitment, dedication, loyalty and numbers, that their voices too will be heard. If social media is so important, then the Beefy Crunch Movement has to mean something more than a 'once every 3 year promotion'.

I'm not saying we have all the answers, but that can't stop us from trying. You've read above that it's not about being perfect; it's about giving it a try. It's not just about the sales; it's about building a relationship. The Beefy Crunch Burrito is not an impossible task for Taco Bell. We are not asking them to come up with a plan to put a man on Mars. While it may be difficult, the only way we can make progress is to experiment and continue to learn and see where we can improve. The Louisville test would have been perfect, if it was a NATIONAL test. While we will always advocate and fight for a permanent solution, a 'Throw Back' promotion is perfectly fine for now as we have been waiting for SO long.

So there you have it. We are at war, not to attack Taco Bell, but to draw attention and expedite a response that is well overdue. This can all stop by a simple email or a call.

Keep speaking. Keep fighting. #BeefyCrunchMovement

-Richard