

CNN's Worst Marketing Idea?

Over the weekend, I attended a conservative think tank's annual dinner. Before hitting the reception, I made my way to the restroom. Humorously, standing next to one of Minnesota's candidates for governor, we found ourselves staring down at a CNN logo on a urine screen sitting at the bottom of each urinal.



Another man walked in while we were still standing at the urinals and he joked that someone at CNN had the worst marketing idea in the history of advertising. Nonetheless, he told us he was happy to oblige them by doing his business on the brand.

Now the location of the event was the Minneapolis Convention Center, which is publicly owned. I'm sure they're happy to host advertising in creative places to help raise revenue and balance the budget. And every urinal had a CNN logo at the bottom of it throughout the many hours I was there. If it wasn't on purpose, you would think someone representing the Convention Center, with thousands of people moving through it at the time, would have pulled the urine screens during that period. Yet, they stayed.

Could it have been advertising? Perhaps.

And let's be honest about CNN, the network has made a [fair number of mistakes](#) lately. Taking advantage of the mistakes, Julian Assange savaged CNN via Twitter calling it, "A [joke of an organization](#) even worse than ABC." But even if CNN is making disastrous reporting mistakes and is a joke to some, I can hardly believe that the marketing team would make the mistake of advertising the brand on urine screens, despite the captured audience.

No, my bet is that some activist plunked those CNN urine

screens in the urinals. It took a lot of Googling, but I did find a company that you can use for such non-traditional activism, the illustriously named PeePeeFace.com. The “personalized urinal screen” isn’t cheap. If you buy in bulk (21-50 units), each screen costs \$8.95 plus shipping and handling. Given the number of urinals, an activist would have spent close to \$50 for such a stunt.

So, if it was an activist that person went to a lot of work to bash CNN, which says a lot about the anti-corporate-media mood many Americans find themselves in. On the Right, conservatives traditionally have had no love for CNN or the other traditional TV news networks. And on the Left, progressives and liberals have had a hatred for Fox News from the start of it.

What we’re in now, though, seems to be different. I’m encountering more and more people who are quitting news television and even reducing their intake of news from the internet or the papers. These are people who have achieved a great deal of success in their careers and are the types that still get paper versions of both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, as well as an assortment of different magazines, in order to stay informed. They also religiously watched the news. Shockingly, they really don’t want to be informed any more; they’re disgusted by all of it.

Indeed, the Knight Foundation reports that “Americans’ perceptions of the News Media are generally negative, and their perceptions of bias have grown considerably from a generation ago.” Here are a few of the polling data the Foundation shared:

- More Americans have a negative (43%) than a positive (33%) view of the news media, while 23% are neutral.
- Today, 66% of Americans say most news media do not do a good job of separating fact from opinion. In 1984, 42%

held this view.

- Less than half of Americans, 44%, say they can think of a news source that reports the news objectively. Republicans who can name an accurate source overwhelmingly mention Fox News®, while Democrats' responses are more varied.
- On a multiple-item media trust scale with scores ranging from a low of zero to a high of 100, the average American scores a 37.
- Media trust is highly influenced by partisanship, with Democrats largely trusting the media and Republicans distrusting. Older Americans tend to view the media more positively than younger adults do.

When you combine the numbers shared by the Knight Foundation with the possibility that a conservative activist had urine screens made with the CNN logo on them as a way for “the little guy” to fight what he sees as an enemy, you can be assured that we’re moving in to a new era.

If you want to keep your sanity, it seems like unplugging really is the best option. Unfortunately, though, that leaves you “uninformed” in a country that needs informed voters in order to avoid despotism and a truly dysfunctional government.

What are we to do? It’s clear that the media, not just Fox, have taken off the masks of objectivity and revealed their true colors. Do we need to adjust?

Back in the 1800s, regions in America often had two major newspapers, one for each of the major political parties – for instance, you will see papers with names like the *Democrat Gazette* and the *Republican Sentinel* from that time period. If you wanted to be informed you read both newspapers, knowing their biases, and came to your own conclusions.

Perhaps the belief that the news can be bias-free was wrong all along. Are we angry at the media because they are obviously biased or are we angry because they are biased and we believe they shouldn't be?

If it is the latter, then we may need to modify our expectations for the new political world that we're entering. The media will also need to drop the canard that they're objective and unbiased. They will simply need to be open about their biases. That might bring the collective blood-pressure of Americans down a bit.

But what do you do if you don't trust any of them? That's the real question.