

Erin O'Brien

Laura and Jim were traveling in their RV to visit their three children who now live across the country from them. They were looking for somewhere to sleep on their travels and decided that pulling into Walmart would be a good choice rather than pushing through the night. When they first contacted Walmart, Walmart decided that this would be a good look for them, making them seem more family oriented and family friendly. Walmart flew both Laura and Jim to Las Vegas, gifted them a new RV, the RV had "Working Families for Wal-Mart" on the side. As Laura and Jim began their 2834 mile journey from Las Vegas to Georgia, their gas was paid for. Laura decided that she would start a blog that would document their journey and all the positive Wal-Mart experiences they encountered while on their trip.

However people at home that are also involved in the blogging world began to ask questions about whether or not this trip was actually real or if it was just a way for Walmart to promote themselves in a positive way. When Laura and Jim were about half way through their trip the payments and arrangements of their deal with Walmart became disclosed. The public was then able to see that though the couple actually was traveling to visit their children, a public relations agency was involved in making the trip, within the Walmart RV, possible. This then made people question why the agreement had been kept quiet for so long, this only making it more suspicious. Laura spoke on the issue stating, "they wanted to get permission to take pictures in the walmart parking lots and talk to the people who they encountered while on the journey." The two reached out to Laura's brother who works for Edelman, the public relations agency involved, for guidance on what to do through this process. After asking for permission to post about their journey and their agreement, the two were not given the permission to talk on the situation. Laura then goes on to say that Walmart wanted to spread the word on all of the positive

things that Walmart does to help families in need and they offered them the opportunity to go on a trip that they could experience and write about. Though they explained themselves in the statement, that did not stop them from receiving backlash from people who were skeptical about the situation. Many of the skeptics say this as a huge public relations stunt to get the public to form a more positive outlook on Walmart as a brand and as a corporation.

The internet took to this like it was made of sugar. People from all sides took to defending and bashing both Laura and Jim, as well as Walmart and all the other parties involved in the situation. There were many opinions on the issue that Working Families for Walmart the website tried to counter by posting all the positive messages and things Walmart did for the community. Websites like WakeUpWalmart.com, established in 2005, had their own perspective and opinion on how Walmart handles themselves and how this issue was just a publicity stunt aimed at raising their sales, by giving off a better self image to the public. The internet battle between Walmart and nonsupporters only got worse in 2006, when many counter websites were created from both sides trying to discredit the others. The public relations agency involved in this entire situation, Edelman, also spoke on Walmarts behalf trying to discredit the websites talking poorly of the corporation. A statement was made by a Walmart spokesperson on behalf of the corporation stating that as long as the internet was somewhere shoppers went to find out information on their stores, they would remain involved in this internet conversation, to provide credible information on their stores.

This online fight over walmart was taken as a form of public scrutiny meaning that walmart was being closely monitored on the internet platform. However, the Walmart corporation was not only using the internet platform to create a more positive image of the corporation. The company also used cash and merchandise donations to increase their popularity

among the community. The company also planned to open 50 new stores all placed in economically challenged areas to help provide options for cheap items.

In my opinion this campaign shows that Walmart is truly trying to help the community and show that they are family oriented and are glad to be able to help families and people in need. I think that by encouraging the families and other people within the community to shop at their stores, by showing highlights of good deeds they are doing is a key factor in their companies marketing. While the corporation should have made their deal with Laura and Jim more public to eliminate the idea of a public relations stunt, I believe that they were genuine about why they allowed for Laura and Jim to receive all that they did. Of course Walmart knew of the benefit that would come from giving two normal people this amazing opportunity, but I strongly believe they did it for the benefit of Laura and Jim. The only ethical mistake I see in this issue is that the full disclosure of the agreement wasn't given to the public at an earlier time, to eliminate the negative thoughts and rumors that could be conceived of such a generous opportunity. Though there were negative thoughts that were posted about the company on many different social media and internet sources, Walmart fought back against these claims and made their position on helping the community very clear by not only using social media and the internet to boost their positive impact on the community. The use of many different platforms makes it very difficult for people to try and bash the good deeds that Walmart is performing for the people within its surrounding communities. Every company wants to be seen in a positive light to the public. No company is going to try to hide what they are doing to help the public. Though many people will try to deny it, a positive look in the eye of the public, means more people shopping in your stores, more people shopping in your stores means more revenue that your company will receive. So why would any company not want to create a better look for their

company? Every company would do the same thing that Walmart did to encourage shoppers to come to a family friendly store.