

# Business Nightmares

The inside story of business risks that didn't pay off



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Companies rarely become household names without taking the occasional risk – and sometimes risks don't pay off. Evan Davis and business leaders including entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson, inventor Sir James Dyson and branding supremo Rita Clifton analyse stories of business mistakes from the 1970s to the present day.

In this entertaining and fast-paced series, company insiders reveal how their carefully laid plans and projects unravelled. The results are dramatic: public outcry, plummeting share price, lost reputations, lost jobs and even company collapse.

## Marketing Mess-ups

Evan Davis explores stories of how marketing and publicity drives that seemed like a great idea at the time turned into commercial catastrophes.

Soft drink Sunny Delight had one of the most successful British product launches ever. But it suffered a sensational fall from grace when its makers were accused of giving parents the impression that the product was healthier than it really was, and even turning a child orange. Hoover's disastrous free flights promotion resulted in multimillion pound losses and customers in revolt.

The fundamental business lesson of not insulting your customer emerges from the most famous gaffe of all - uttered by jewellery retailer Gerald Ratner. Evan and the business leaders also dissect Apple's awkward public handling of a defect in its iPhone4, and the misjudged makeover attempted by fragrance and cosmetics company Yardley, in a vain attempt to appeal to younger customers.

## Doomed Designs

Evan discovers stories about mistakes in product design and manufacture, and learns that some of the most damaging errors are committed when

companies are locked in battle with a feared competitor. Stories include Unilever's new soap powder that was so powerful it not only destroyed stains, but also shredded clothes. As for the Mini, it may be a design classic, but there was a fundamental problem with its price, which was too low.

Other stories featured are Coca-Cola's mindboggling decision to reinvent the world's bestselling soft drink, the mistimed development of the Rabbit phone, and the tale of how Polaroid's massive instant photography business withered and died when it failed to respond to technological advances.

## Disastrous Decisions

Evan examines five stories about strategic mistakes made by ambitious companies. It seems that when companies aspire to great things, there is greater potential to succeed; but also further to stumble.

There were excruciating repercussions when Cadbury was enveloped in the political storm over rising rates of childhood obesity. More notorious was the stratospheric rise and expensive fall of boo.com, a startup that tried to go global from day one. Other stories include Freddie Laker, who started small with his airline, Skytrain, but who grew the business too fast, with calamitous results for his cashflow.

Retail institution Marks and Spencer tripped up when an attempt to conquer America by buying preppy outfitters Brooks Brothers ended in costly retreat. Evan concludes with one of the most recent and biggest business nightmares of all – the ill-advised takeover that transformed the Royal Bank of Scotland into a bank in need of a bail-out.

Please note: episode titles and order are not confirmed.

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