

Lessons From Ben Affleck: How to Recreate Your Brand Image, Find a Niche, and More

by STEPHANIE SCHAEFER on MARCH 5, 2013



The year is 1998.

Two fresh-faced Boston boys [giddily accept their Oscars for Best Original Screenplay](#). Affleck is the class valedictorian, standing at the podium with wide-eyed ambition. Overnight, he becomes the new golden boy. Not only the kind of All-American who girls want to poster on their walls, but also the kind of artist who has gained respect from a theater full of older and wiser film connoisseurs.

After *Good Will Hunting*'s success, Affleck could do no wrong.

That is until he did.

Deemed "[Hollywood's Greatest Failure](#)" by *Forbes* magazine, Affleck had a post-success journey that was about as smooth as a Nor'easter storm (full disclosure: I too am from Boston, so I know what I'm talking about here). Although he gained widespread publicity for *Armageddon* and *Pearl Harbor*, these roles left him with less than mediocre reviews.

By the early 2000s, Affleck's career really took a downward spiral. He became the equivalent of the quarterback who peaks in high school only to spend his post-adolescent years dating the wrong girls and taking odd jobs. It's hard to believe that 10 years ago the now polished director was sporting a white tank top and greasy hair [atop J-Lo's yacht](#), while starring in box office bombs like *Gigli* and *Daredevil*.

But, as we saw from Affleck's *Argo* win, you can rise and fall and *rise again*.

As Kim Caviness pointed out during the Golden Globes, we can [learn a lot from acceptance speeches](#). Maybe it's my Boston roots, but watching the now teary-eyed father of three once again humbly accepting an Oscar struck an emotional nerve.

I decided to dissect Affleck's life lessons and apply them to content marketing.

Bad Mistakes Can Shape Good Content

"I lived with this tremendous fear of failure, because my father was a playwright and a director, and I think he did a couple of things as a child as an actor as well, and he... he failed, basically," [Affleck told Q&A](#) in November. "He didn't do what he said he was going to do. He worked with guys who later became famous, like James Woods and Dustin Hoffman, and he wasn't successful. And that wasn't going to be me." Affleck made it a goal to learn from the failures of his alcoholic father.

Take a minute and think about what message you *don't* want to convey and what image you *don't* want to portray.

I'm sure most of us media pros are thinking, "You know who I don't want to be? The guy who called 9-year-old [Quvenzhané Wallis](#) an explicit name in a [tweet for The Onion](#)." Use mistakes to [really](#) think about who you want to become. And likewise, use [others' successes](#) to help you achieve your goal.

Not to sound like an after-school special, but while we can learn from others' failures, recognizing our individual slip-ups will truly teach us the tough lessons. During his raw and honestly inspirational Oscar speech, Affleck told us "It's not important how you get knocked down—that's going to happen—it's that you get back up." Cliché? Maybe. Downright true? Definitely.

Affleck described 2003 ([aka the year where he looked like a used car salesman](#)) as the worst year of his life. He could have easily become some washed-up actor paying the bills with stints on VH1 shows, however he went a different route. Maybe he doesn't quite have the acting chops of DeNiro or Brando, but he [found his individual niche](#) directing hits such as *Gone Baby Gone*, *The Town*, and, of course, *Argo*.

Affleck may never win best actor. But you know what? Just because McDonald's may never be atop a fancy best restaurant list doesn't mean it isn't the most successful fast food chain.

The takeaway? Find your individual voice. Whether you are a writer, PR pro, or CEO, find out what you're good at (or what your brand's strengths are) and go with it—and of course don't be afraid to mess up.

Failure's Silver Lining = Opportunity For Rebranding

Although Bradley Cooper technically taught us this lesson (who doesn't love a good movie pun?), Affleck actually lived it. We all know Ben had a string of flops and movies he's not proud of. In an [interview with MTV](#) Affleck talks about the failure of *Daredevil*, stating, "We missed a lot in that movie." But, what did he get out of it? Jennifer Garner. And no, I'm not saying she was a conciliation prize he got to take home after poorly acting as a superhero. But, Garner was a fresh-start and second chance. A chance to go from J-Lo's greasy boy-toy to Jennifer Garner's devoted husband. A reawaking, or rebranding of *Bennifer* as I like to call it.

What can we take away from his happily-ever-after romance?

It's never too late to recreate an image, whether it is your persona, a client's message, or an entire brand. Affleck's tale teaches companies that you don't even have to change your name to reinvent yourself (coincidentally the name *Bennifer* works for both relationships.) Affleck is essentially the Apple Inc. of Hollywood—a decade after hitting rock bottom his personal stock skyrocketed à la the iPhone boom.

Good Content Is Hard Work

In his acceptance speech, Affleck honestly thanked his wife in the line, "[Marriage] is work, but it's the best kind of work. And there's no one I'd rather work with."

Tabloids quickly jumped on the divorce speculation, but I applaud Affleck on his genuineness. Anything rewarding is usually a lot of work. Pitches, articles, new business deals, and relationships with others (clients included) all take time and effort.

Nurture your relationship with your media message—like all marriages this requires compromise, communication, and adaptability.

In the words of America's golden boy turned butt-of-the-joke turned Best Picture recipient, "Work hard and don't hold grudges."

[Image: [The Rachel Maddow Show](#)]

Written by: **Stephanie Schaefer**

Stephanie writes for JCKonline.com. She loves cupcakes and power-ballad sing-alongs.



Anuli March 5, 2013 at 12:47 pm

I really enjoyed reading this piece Stephanie.

I'm a fan of zingers like, "Affleck may never win best actor. But you know what? Just because McDonald's may never be atop a fancy best restaurant list doesn't mean it isn't the most successful fast food chain."



Stephanie Schaefer March 5, 2013 at 1:52 pm

Thanks Anulil



Nick Stamoulis March 7, 2013 at 2:04 pm

This article is a great example of how everyone loves a come back story. Businesses and content marketers can take inspiration from this. Some of the best content can be about a company's challenges and how they overcame them. We're all human, we all make mistakes – so why not turn our learning experiences into educational, informational content for others?



Kellie Durante March 11, 2013 at 2:31 pm

Loved this article! And I completely agree with Anuli...that was a fantastic point re McDonald's.

His humble return to success is motivating for us all...

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Michael makes videos for a living ... and for fun. What better way to cash in on a life spent primarily staring at a television.



Kim Caviness

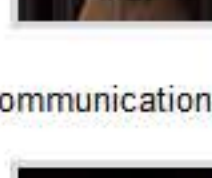
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