

What Do You Meme by That?

The Effective Use of Humor by Brands on Social Media

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What Do You Meme By That?

The Effective Use of Humor in Social Media

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Why So Serious?

- 91% of consumers want a brand to be funny
- 95% of business fear using humor



Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?

- Fear of offending & “cancel culture”



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?



SPIKE YOUR
BEST FRIEND'S
EGGNOG WHEN THEY'RE
NOT LOOKING.



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?

- Fear of offending & “cancel culture”
- Subjectivity and difficulty of execution



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?

 daily dot

Trending Tech Politics Culture Memes Labor Hacks About ▾

SOCIETY

Meme-based Kia ad campaign gets facepalm from Cheezburger users

Cheezburger—the company behind LOLCats—lent its meme-based branding to Kia for an ad campaign, but Cheezburger fans don't find it very “funneh.”



Fidel Martinez

Updated on May 21 2025 7:28 pm CDT


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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?

- Fear of offending & “cancel culture”
- Subjectivity and difficulty of execution
- Maintaining brand image & professionalism



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?



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- Distraction from core messaging



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?

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- Distraction from core messaging
- Lack of tools & expertise



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?



DiGiorno Pizza 
@DiGiornoPizza

#WhyIStayed You had pizza.

9/8/14, 11:11 PM



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?



DiGiorno Pizza 

@DiGiornoPizza

 Follow

A million apologies. Did not read what the hashtag was about before posting.

11:15 PM - 8 Sep 2014

236 RETWEETS 274 FAVORITES



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?

- Fear of offending & “cancel culture”
- Subjectivity and difficulty of execution
- Maintaining brand image & professionalism
- Distraction from core messaging
- Lack of tools & expertise
- “Silence, brand!” phenomenon



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Why Are Brands Afraid To Be Funny?

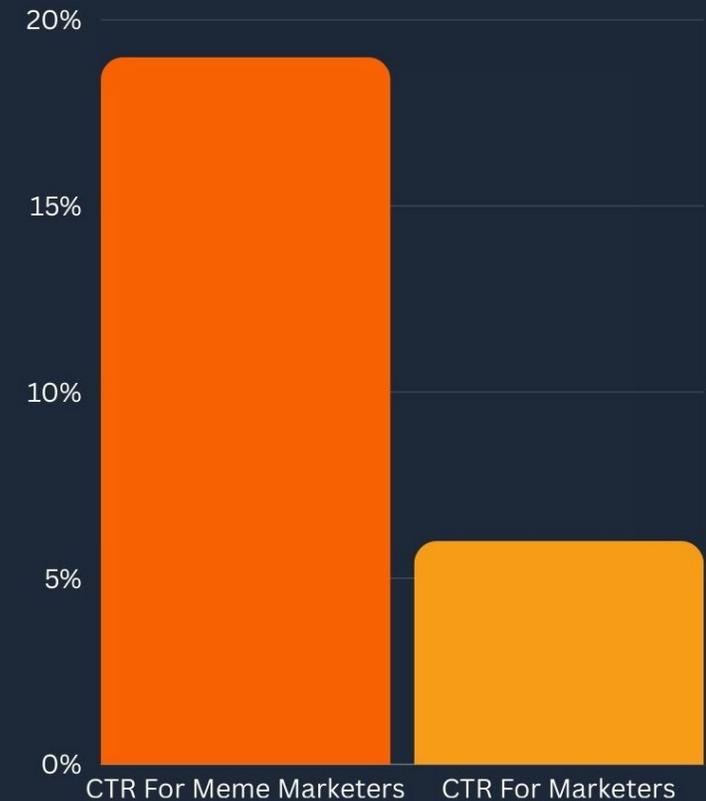


But Humor Works!

- Humor fosters emotional connections.
- Makes brands appear more approachable and human.
- Leads to increased likes, comments, and shares.
- Breaks through noise - humor captures attention, helping content stand out.
- Can lead to clicks/conversions.



Click-through rates for Meme Marketing vs. Marketing



The Impact of Humor

- **Increased Engagement**

Up to a 35% boost in likes, comments, and shares compared to neutral posts.

(Sprout)

- **Lasting Impression**

71% of consumers enjoy brands that use humor, and 45% said funny content makes them more likely to remember

the brand. (Sprout)



The Impact of Humor

- **Enhanced Brand Perception**

72% prefer humorous brands over serious ones.

- **Shareability**

People are more likely to share and remember content that makes them laugh, expanding organic reach.



Humor Done Right



Wendy's: The Queen of Roasts

- Known for witty, playful banter with competitors and customers.
- Kristin Tormey, shaped the brand's distinctive social media voice.
- Snark level varies across platforms to resonate with specific audiences while maintaining a consistent core identity.



Wendy's 
@Wendys · [Follow](#)

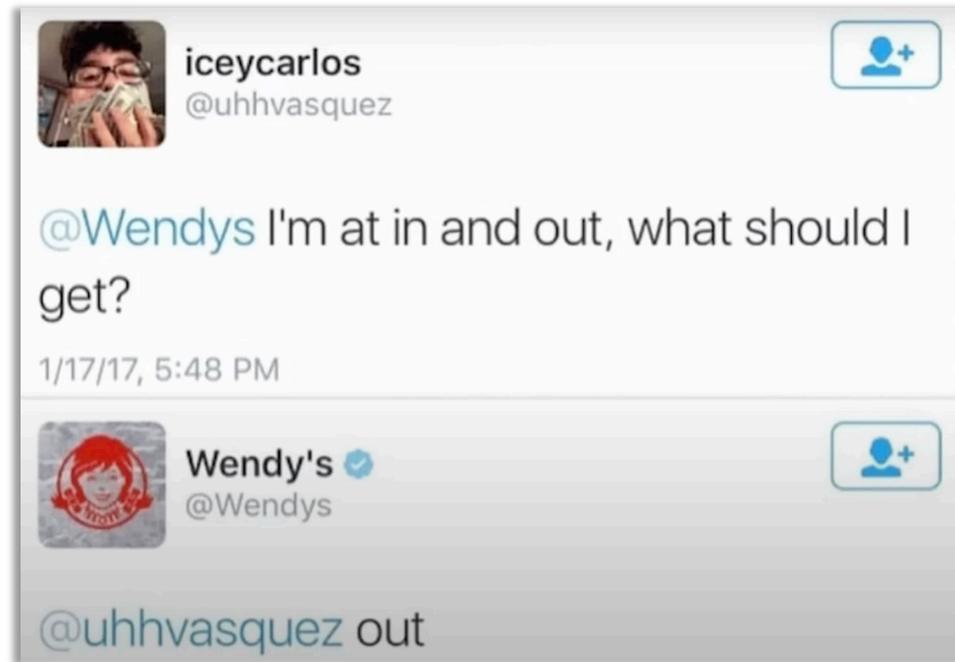


When the tweets are as broken as the ice cream machine.
[x.com/McDonaldsCorp/...](https://x.com/McDonaldsCorp/)

 **McDonald's Corporation**  @McDonaldsCorp

Black Friday **** Need copy and link****

Wendy's: The Queen of Roasts



National Park Service: Educational Humor

- Known for humorous yet informative messages to effectively communicate safety tips and park information.
- Matt Turner had worked for NPS for 13 years before taking over their social media, giving him a solid background to build from.
- The content often features witty advisories, such as “Do not pet the fluffy cows,” to educate the public on safety and park policies.



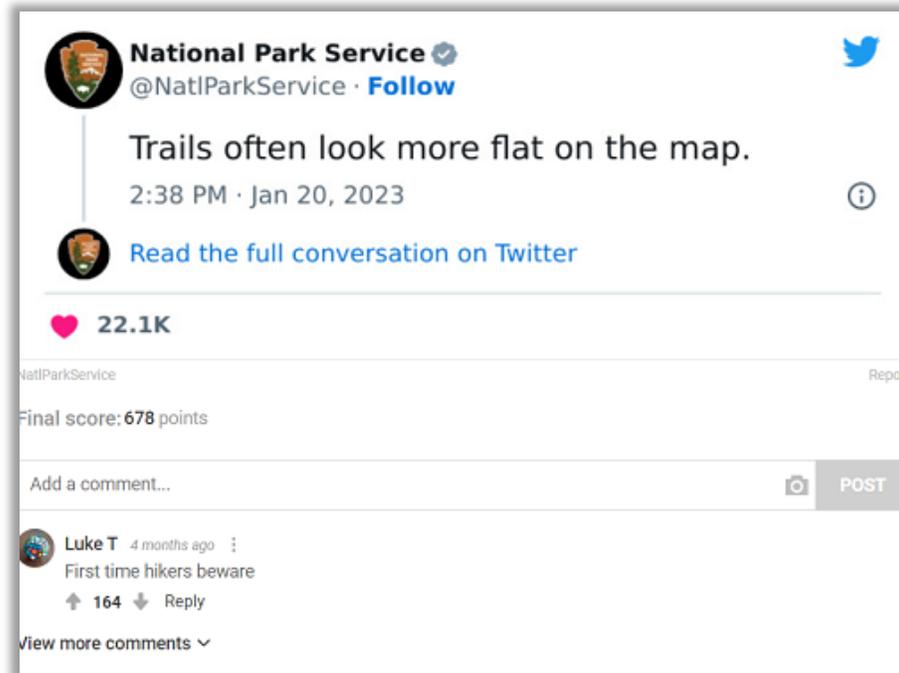
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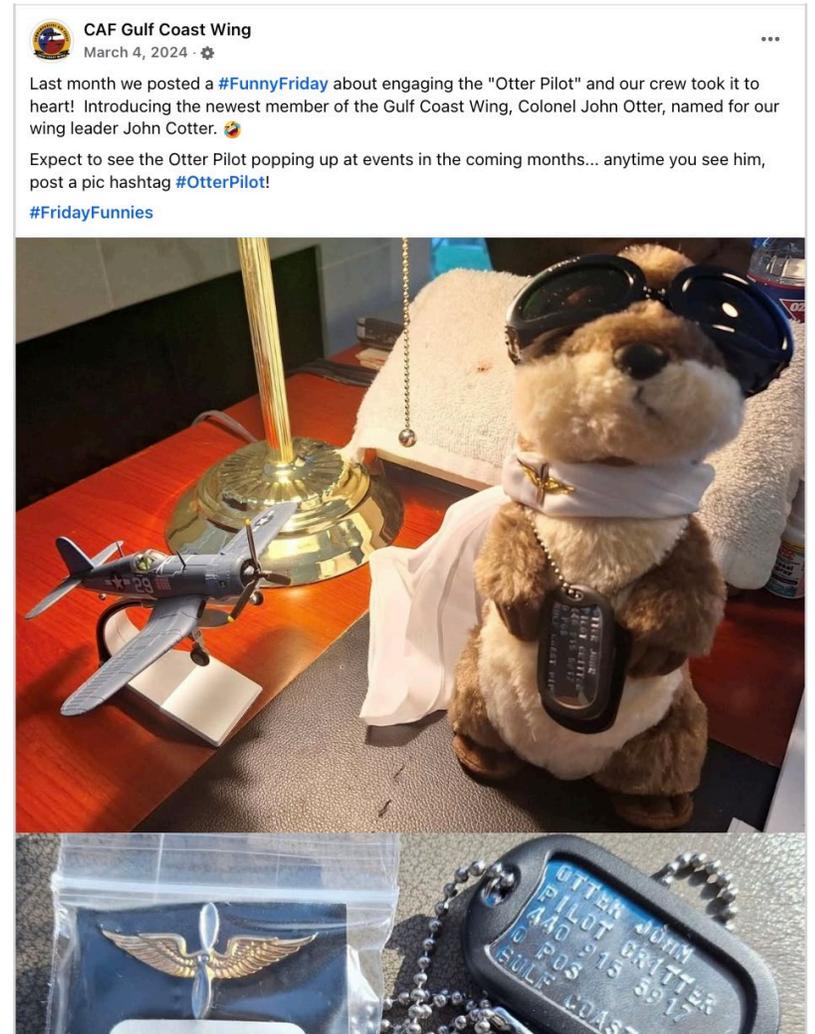
National Park Service 
@NatlParkService

Hike in groups. Bears like to have options.

National Park Service: Educational Humor



Gulf Coast Wing: Delightfully Quirky



Gulf Coast Wing: Delightfully Quirky



CAF Gulf Coast Wing @CAFGulfCoastWing · May 22, 2024

It's getting hard to keep up with all the adventures of our otter pilot, John Otter, so we thought we'd start this album to help you keep up with him!



12 89 849



Cameron Osborne @flyguy47 · May 24, 2024

Who is running this account??? 🤔🤔🤔

8 5 114



Cameron Osborne @flyguy47 · May 24, 2024

Who is running this account??? 🤔🤔🤔

8 5 114



CAF Gulf Coast Wing @CAFGulfCoastWing · May 25, 2024



16 50 399



Gulf Coast Wing: Delightfully Quirky



CAF Gulf Coast Wing

December 25, 2024 · 🌐

John Otter is starring in his own Christmas special this year, but you have to help us come up with the plot. What do you think? 🤔

Merry Christmas from our family to yours!



👍❤️🤔 You, Jarrod Crandell, Ed Coleman and 126 others

10 comments 2 shares

🤔 Haha

🗨 Comment

🔄 Share



Context Matters – When Humor Backfires

- Most self-inflicted social media crises come from inappropriate attempts at humor.
- Know your audience, know the situation, “read the room.”
- Ask someone you trust about potentially sensitive topics.
- Avoid controversial topics.



This very short-lived 2012 promotion had Mountain Dew fans name its new drink. Suggestions like the contest winner, “**Hitler did nothing wrong**” had Mountain Dew apologize to consumers, claiming that they “lost to the Internet.”

How to Vet a Joke BEFORE You Post

- **Peer review** – ask others what they think, especially if the joke has to do with a particular audience and you can access members of that audience
- **Run it by HR/Legal** –you may have to advocate for humor because they will want to say no
- **Soft launch/test** on Stories or smaller stakes channels.



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Finding Your Brand's Sense of Humor

- Know your audience.
- Align humor with brand values.
- Develop your unique tone... Are you quirky, irreverent, silly?
- Be consistent (but not necessarily identical) across platforms.
- A/B test, gather feedback.



Wait, is Victoria's Secret that she has a stealth bomber?!



Using Memes

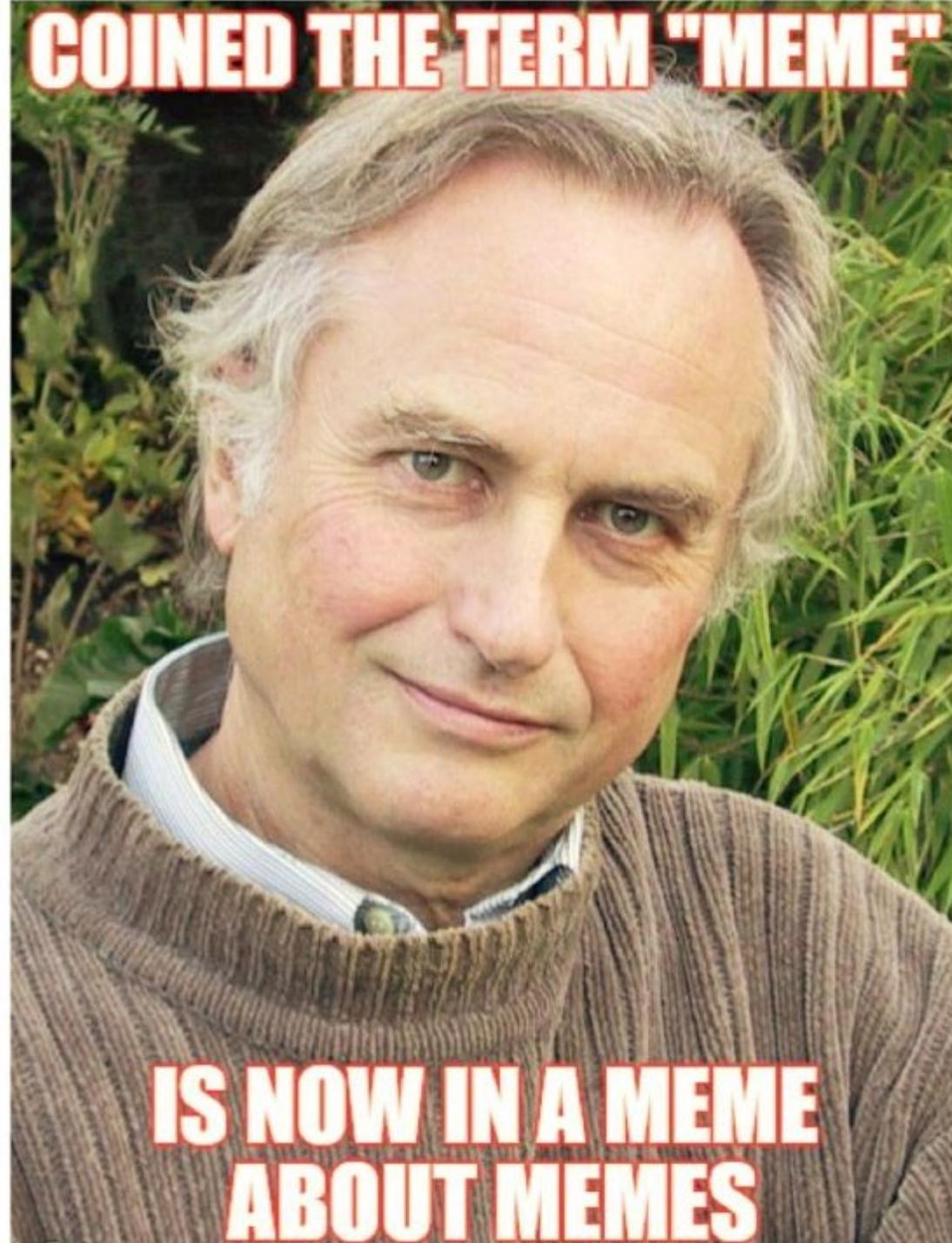
- Great filler content.
- Demonstrates sense of humor.
- Can playfully engage audience.
- Know your audience and know your memes!



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What is a Meme?

- Meme =
unit of cultural information
spread by imitation.
- The term was coined in 1976
by British evolutionary
biologist Richard Dawkins.
- From the Greek *mimema*,
meaning “imitated”



What is a Meme?

In digital marketing...

- Humorous content that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations.
- Typically convey a cultural idea, trend, or behavior in a funny or relatable way.



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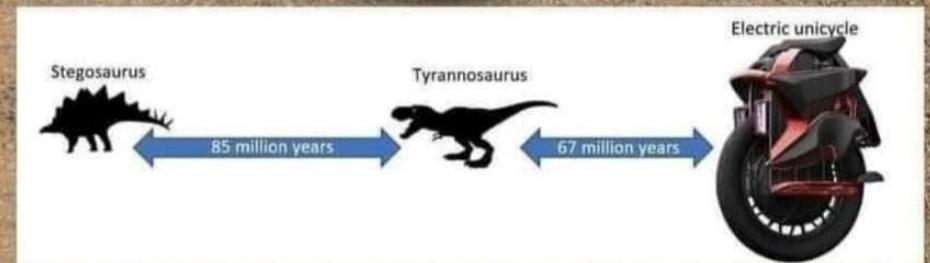
Social Media Marketing Expectation vs. Reality



Find a Similar Meme-ing

See a good meme that made you laugh, but it doesn't really apply to your audience?

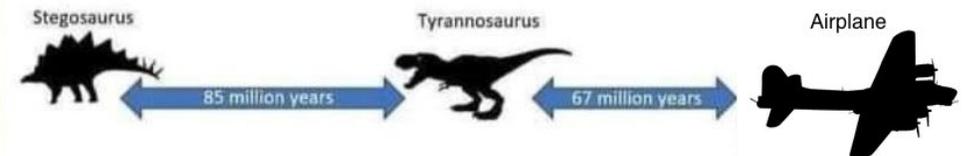
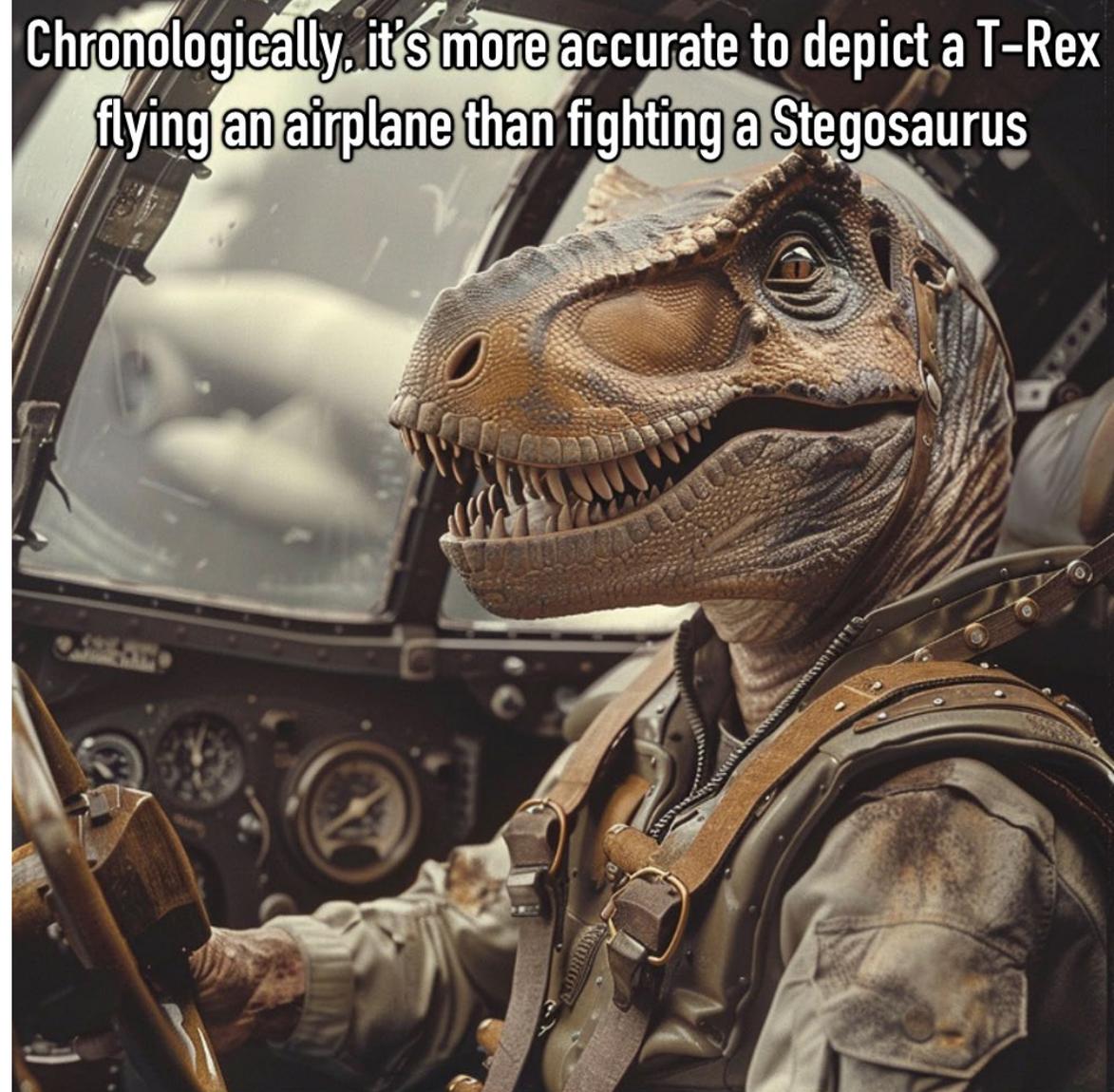
Chronologically it is more accurate to depict a T-Rex on a unicycle than to depict one fighting a Stegosaurus.



Find a Similar Meme-ing

See a good meme that made you laugh, but it doesn't really apply to your audience?

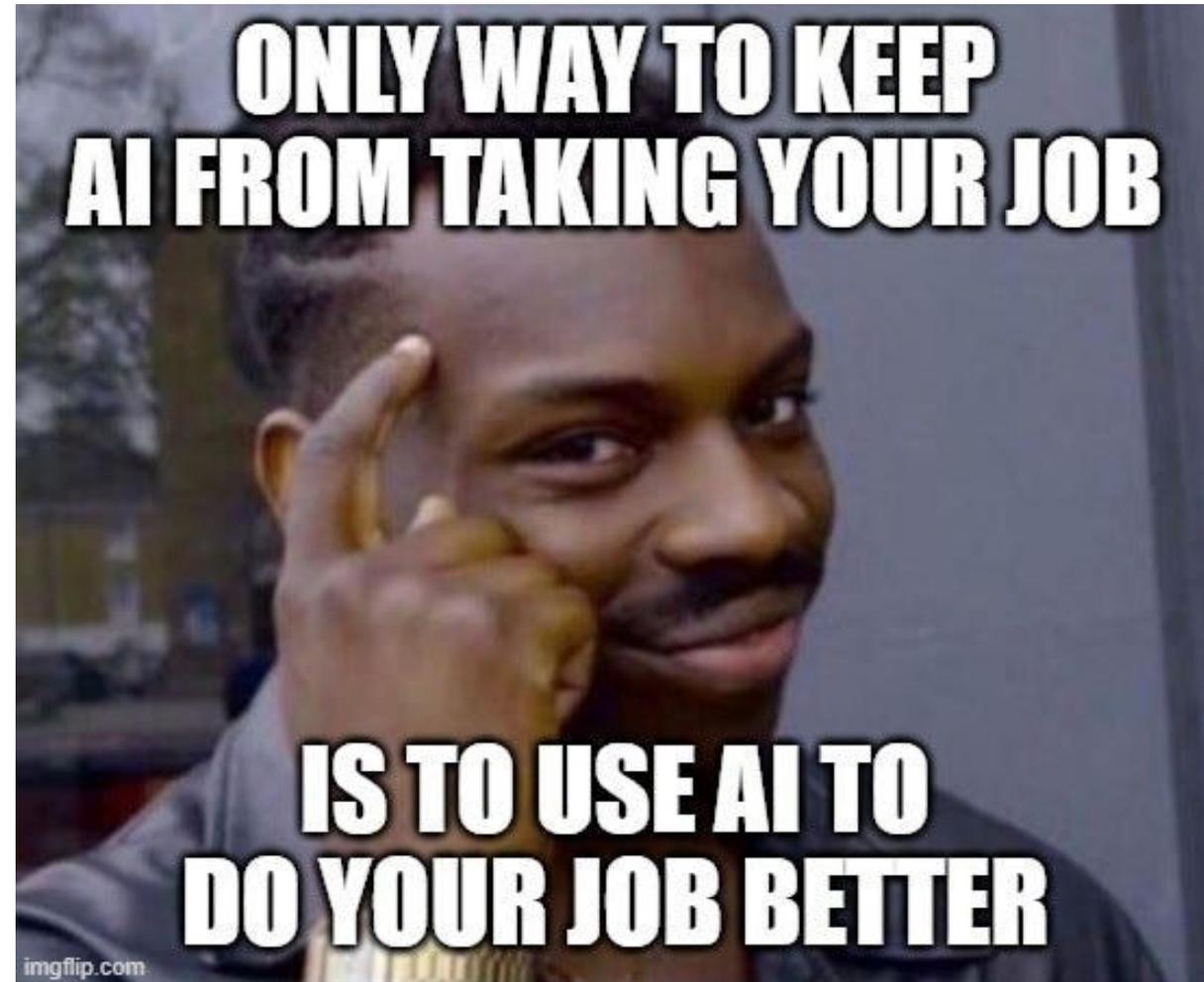
Could it, with a little help?



Find a Deeper Meme-ing

Know classic memes and look for opportunities to update them.

“Know your Meme” is a good source for history and templates.



Executing a Humor Strategy

- Establish Goals: Are you trying to drive engagement, improve brand perception, etc.
- Incorporate Humor into Content Calendars: #FunnyFriday, #WackyWednesday, #Silly Saturday, or just number/week.
- Responding in Real Time: Keep sense of humor in mind when responding to comments and look for opportunities to use humor in replies and community management.



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Executing a Humor Strategy

- Wholesome sense of humor in responses...



trashboat
@bellalawtonn



The boys I nanny for just asked me where I work and I didnt have the heart to tell them their parents pay me to hang out with them so now they think I work at Chili's

5:53 PM · Jun 12, 2018 from Granger, IN



♡ 491K



Chili's Grill & Bar ✓
@Chilis



Replying to @bellalawtonn

Here is that super important documentation we were talking about from very important people here at Chili's. [#ChilisLove](#)



Executing a Humor Strategy

- Clapback sense of humor in responses...



Executing a Humor Strategy

- Irreverent sense of humor in responses...



Buckles and Bulls
@BucklesandBulls



101-Year-Old Veteran Says Cold Coors Light Is The Secret To Long Life dlvr.it/QszQKr



2:29 PM · Dec 6, 2018



♡ 24



Samuel Adams Beer ●
@SamuelAdamsBeer



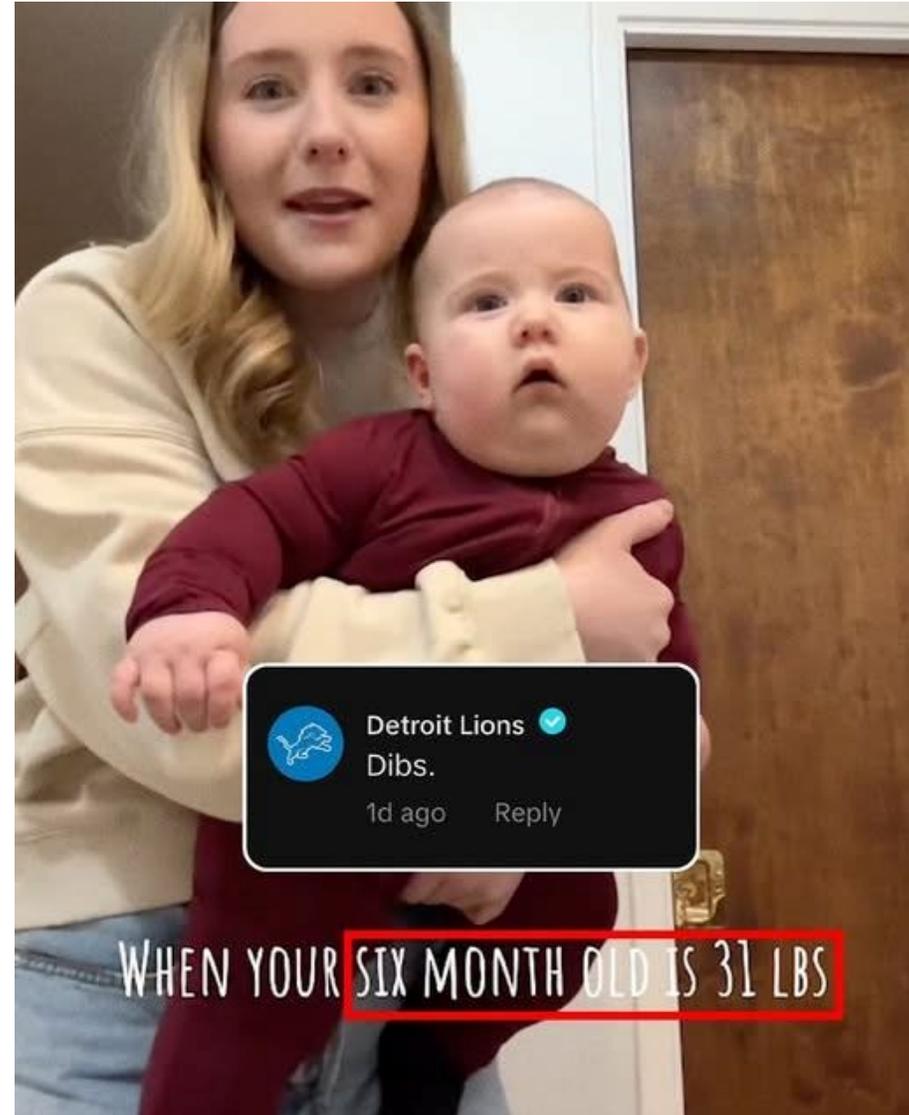
Everyone already knows water is good for you lmfao 🤔🤔🤔



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Executing a Humor Strategy

- Look for opportunities to enter the convo!



Executing a Humor Strategy

- Don't be afraid to give the people what they want
- Know your sense of humor and brand voice
- Always proceed with caution and intention
- Screen with target groups
- Watch responses carefully and be ready to act
- Never “coast” or take it for granted



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Questions?

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COMING UP NEXT!

General Session #4 3:30pm

“Innovation by Design”

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