

# Practicing Proper Etiquette on Twitter: We're All Equal—And Equally Responsible

By Michael Parker

On Friday, December 20, 2013, Justine Sacco, a public relations executive with **Inter-ActiveCorp** (IAC), boarded a British Airways flight in London as she prepared for a two-week vacation in South Africa. Before departing, Sacco, who was born in the nation that was also the birthplace of civil rights icon Nelson Mandela, sent a 75-character tweet to her roughly 500 followers that, over the course of the next 12 hours, would result in an international firestorm:



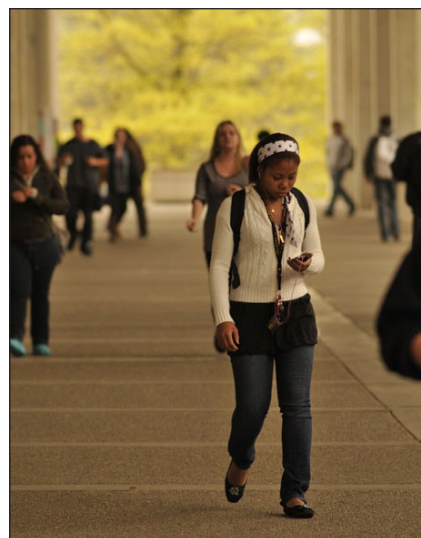
Sacco, who served as director of corporate communications at IAC, spent the next 12 hours on a flight to Cape Town. In the interim, her tweet had been posted and shared by sites such as **BuzzFeed** and **Mashable**. Thousands upon thousands of people began following Sacco’s account, and an avalanche of angry responses soon followed.

The hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet jumped to the top of **Twitter’s** “trending” list. IAC, which manages brands such as Vimeo, About.com, and The Daily Beast, issued a

formal apology. All of this occurred, as AIC put it, while Sacco was “unreachable on an international flight.” In the span of 12 hours, Sacco had gone from unknown to infamous. By Saturday morning, she was out of a job.

Much of the initial debate around Sacco’s actions focused on questions such as, “Shouldn’t a PR executive know better?” Her tweet was clearly offensive, racist, and showed an appalling lack of knowledge of the terrible toll AIDS has wrought on Sub-Saharan Africa.

The real looming questions for PR executives should include: What are the risks of doing business on Twitter? Could my organization face a similar situation to IAC? Is there any way to protect my organization from a



*As an open network, Twitter can be easily accessed or viewed from any internet-capable device, allowing students, employees or anyone to quickly share updates with friends or followers. (Photo courtesy of University at Albany)*