

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

LIGHT UP RACING SOCIAL MEDIA REPLY GUIDE

Why reply?

Responding to misinformation isn't about convincing one loud troll - it's for the thousands "only here for the comments," quietly forming opinions. These silent spectators are the real audience. If you don't set the record straight, they'll walk away misinformed. Trolls shout, but the silent majority notice the rational perspective.

RULES TO LIVE BY

ADDRESS THE PERSON BY THEIR NAME (WHEN AVAILABLE).

A person's name is the sweetest sound they'll hear. Using it reminds them-and everyone watching-that they're dealing with a real person, not just a faceless account. It often diffuses aggression and encourages a more respectful, thoughtful exchange.

USE THE TERM 'OPEN-MINDED'.

Challenging someone to be "open-minded" is a subtle but powerful tool. People hate being seen as closed-minded, so when you frame a response that way, they'll bend over backwards to prove they're not. Suddenly, they're more open to hearing you out, And the silent crowd watching will see you as the calm, reasonable voice.

QUESTION THE INFORMATION SOURCE.

Asking, "Where did you hear that?" flips the script. It forces them to question their own source, and often exposes shaky info. You're not being aggressive, just making them think twice. Meanwhile, you're seen as the one with facts, not noise.

INVITE THEM IN.

Invite them to visit stables and stud farms. Most won't take you up on it, but by not responding, they'll come off as closed-minded and unwilling to engage. Meanwhile, you'll clearly show that the industry has nothing to hide, and the audience watching will see who's being transparent and open to dialogue. It's a win-win.

DEFAULT TO DATA AND SCIENCE.

Vague claims fall apart when you back up your points with hard facts. It shows you're grounded in reality, not just opinions. Plus, when trolls argue with sensational emotion, you're the one standing on solid ground—and the silent crowd watching sees that too. Facts win trust.

THE CLEAR STRATEGY

FOR SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSES

- C** **CURIOSITY**
Show you're genuinely curious about their perspective, not defensive. "What makes you think that?" or "Where does your information come from?" can go a long way in lowering the heat.
- L** **LISTEN**
Acknowledge their concern in a concise way, showing you've paid attention. For example: "I hear you're concerned about horse welfare in racing."
- E** **EXPOSE CONTRADICTIONS**
Gently point out contradictions in their argument to invite deeper thinking without confrontation. For example: "I understand your concerns, but animals are involved in farming, therapy, and even as our pets; isn't it close-minded to single out horse racing?"
- A** **AUTHENTIC**
Be upfront about the areas where even you have doubts. Saying, "You're right, there's room to improve, and here's what's changing," adds transparency. Gently challenge their assumptions by pointing out positive progress without sounding defensive.
- R** **RESEARCH/REAL EXPERIENCE**
Share facts, but make them relatable. Reference real experiences from stables or farms. If possible, invite them to see things firsthand, even if they don't take the offer; it shows you've got nothing to hide.

One reply is enough: A single, clear response gets the facts out for the silent majority... the people scrolling and forming opinions. Most won't engage, but they'll remember who stayed calm and credible.

Tap out early: When the conversation becomes circular, step back. You've made your point. Continuing just wastes time and energy; confidence comes from knowing when to stop.

Values matter: If they don't believe in any form of animal use, they're not aligned with most Americans. Know when it's a values mismatch, point it out in your comment and move on.

KEY MESSAGES FOR BREEDERS' CUP

Use when: Issuing a formal written statement within hours of an incident.

EQUINE WELFARE

Horse fatalities are rare and declining. Over the past decade, the rate of race-related fatalities represents a 34% decrease. At HISA tracks, it has halved dropped to 0.9; over 50% decrease since 2009.

HISA data shows 99.93% of races were run safely in 2024.

All 200 Breeders' Cup runners have 10 days of pre-race veterinary surveillance. All horses undergo multiple comprehensive vet exams before being allowed to race. These include physical exams, and should it be required, advanced diagnostics, such as ultrasounds, radiography, and endoscopy.

The Breeders' Cup employs a large team of 20 vets. Horses undergo daily physical exams, including jog-up assessments, for soundness and suitability to race.

INTEGRITY

Mandatory drug testing. On race day, all horses are subjected to mandatory pre-race examinations, which include drug testing to ensure that no horse is competing under the influence of prohibited substances.

Out-of-competition drug testing begins as early as June and continues up until race days. Horses selected for OOCT may be tested multiple times.

RACETRACK SAFETY

Racetracks must meet strict HISA standards to maintain accreditation.

Track surfaces undergo rigorous inspections using biomechanical tools and radar to assess track geometry, base stability, and surface consistency. Daily measurements are conducted, capturing moisture content, cushion depth, and weather conditions every 15 minutes.

EXAMPLE RESPONSES

When coming across an instance where the horse has walked away safe and sound, but social media has had a bit of buzz:

Hi x, please see the horse's update here. The horse is OK, he/she was treated/inspected by veterinarians and is currently [insert status]. He/she is receiving the best care available.

"Another injury. Horse racing is abuse, I am done with it!"

Hi [Name], I understand your concern - it's heartbreaking when a horse is injured, and no one feels it more than those in the industry. But there's been huge progress in horse safety: the fatality rate has dropped by 62%, thanks to better vet care, track safety, and strict oversight. Horses are treated like elite athletes, with their wellbeing as the top priority. If you're open to it, I'd love to invite you to visit a stable and see the care firsthand.

"This is why I don't watch horse racing anymore... too heartbreaking."

Hi X, it is absolutely heartbreaking when we lose animals, whether it is a dog getting hit by a car or a horse in a paddock accident. It's hardest on those that love the horse the most. Thankfully fatality rates in horse racing are on a major decline - more than halved in 15 years; its very rare for an incident to occur.

"Why is the scrutiny only for the Breeders' Cup? Don't all horses deserve it?"

Great question, [Name]. It's not just the Breeders' Cup-HISA ensures all races have strict safety protocols and vet oversight. The Breeders' Cup gets attention due to its high profile, but these protections apply year-round for all horses.

When you come across a hard core animal activist who wants racing banned.

- Avoid engaging in tit-for-tat
- Be sharp in your reply and kill them with politeness. The more rational you are, the more irrational they seem
- Point out the difference in values

Hi [Name], I respect your dedication, but most Americans support responsible animal care, whether in farming, therapy, or racing. While our views may differ, we are very proud of horse racing and the positive strides the industry has made in protecting these athletes.

When someone bring up the 2023 KY Derby meet or 2019 Santa Anita:

Hi [Name], yes it was particularly devastating - you're right. But it was a statistical anomaly, you can see the stats here: <https://lightupracing.com/how-many-horses-die-racing/>. There is still a way to go, but equine safety is heading in the right direction thanks to huge efforts around track surfaces, medication policies, checks and regulation, and innovation in vet tech.

When someone brings up how horses are dying 'more than ever'.

Hi [Name], I understand why it feels that way, but the reality is, horse fatalities have actually decreased by 62% in recent years. It's the media attention that's more than ever, not the number of deaths. The industry has made huge strides in safety with stricter protocols and better vet care, but those improvements often don't make the headlines.

When we have someone who believes a horse's wellbeing is not considered or prioritized for racing, and that it's all about money.

Hi [Name], the majority invest far more in their horses than they make back. It's the love of the horse and the sport that drives that investment. Horse welfare is always the top priority. Happy, healthy horses perform better, and that's what everyone in racing is committed to.

When someone says "Horse racing is cruel!"

Hello [Name], You'll find most (but true, not all) thoroughbreds are better treated than most horses - farriers, dentists, vets, chiropractors, physios, a curated diet, and training program. No different to any human athlete!

Hi [Name], racehorses are treated like elite athletes with top-notch care. Their health and happiness are the priority. If you're curious, why not visit a stable and see how they're looked after firsthand? I'd be happy to help arrange it.

Hi [Name], I understand your concerns, but I challenge you to stay open-minded. Racehorses are treated like elite athletes, with their wellbeing always a priority. Have you ever visited a stable to see how they're cared for?

Hi [Name], I get why people have concerns, but the reality is that horse racing has made huge progress in safety and welfare. Horses are given the best care with dedicated teams focused on their health and wellness. If you're open to it, I can share some resources for you to learn more.

When someone believes we send retired racehorses all to slaughter.

Hey [Name], that's an interesting position to hold and actually couldn't be further from the truth. We've got an article about the many amazing careers and lives racehorses go on to have as they transition away from life as a racehorse. It's linked here if you'd be open minded to read it? <https://lightupracing.com/what-happens-to-horses-when-they-retire-from-racing/>

When someone is suggesting the ban of horse racing.

Hi [Name], This is obviously a topic you're passionate about. We'd love to assure you that horse racing is safer than ever (<https://lightupracing.com/how-many-horses-die-racing/>), but we'd be happier to extend an invitation to show you and answer any questions directly - if you'd be open minded enough to consider it? Please let us know and we can arrange.

When there is industry frustration about vet scratches.

Hi [Name], I get why it's frustrating, but imagine if we didn't have this level of vet scrutiny - more injuries, damaged reputation, and irreparable loss of trust in the sport. Keeping horse safety front and center is something to be proud of, it protects the horses and racing's future.

I get why the owners are upset, but without this level of vet scrutiny, we're not just risking the horses, we're risking jobs and the entire industry. Protecting the horses at events like the Breeders' Cup keeps the sport strong and everyone's livelihood secure. It's something we should take pride in.

It's tough, but it shows we're putting welfare first, which is something we can all be proud of.

"Whips are cruel and hurt the horse."

Whips used in racing today are padded and designed to make a sound, not cause pain. There are strict rules on how they're used, and jockeys face fines if they misuse them. Horse safety comes first.

I understand the concerns about whips, but today's racing whips are made with padded foam, designed to create a 'pop' sound rather than hurt the horse. There are strict regulations on how and when they can be used, and misuse leads to penalties. The goal is to guide the horse, not harm it.

“Two-year-old racing is cruel. It should be banned.”

A 2YO thoroughbred is like an 18YO human - mature enough for athletic training. There's plenty of science proving that early racing strengthens their bones and sets them up for longer careers, with no data showing it causes harm.

I get the logical concerns about racing 2-year-olds, but the science tells a different story. Research shows that early racing strengthens their bones and leads to longer, healthier careers. There's no credible evidence of harm when they're properly cared for. If you're open to it, I'd be happy to share the research.

“It's cruel to be racing on a wet track, the racing should be called off.”

Decades of studies show no real link between wet tracks and horse injuries. Tracks are managed carefully with safety steps like sealing or switching to synthetic surfaces. Horses only race when it's safe, and data is clear that wet tracks aren't any more dangerous than dry ones.

While it might seem risky, studies over the years have shown that wet tracks don't lead to more injuries. Tracks are closely monitored, and safety measures like sealing or switching surfaces keep things safe. Horses only race when the conditions are right.

“Racehorses all race on drugs.”

Actually, that's not true. Racing has strict 'drug-free' rules, and horses are tested regularly. Performance-enhancing drugs are banned, and violations come with serious consequences - just ask Servis and Navarro, who are both in jail for their role in illegal doping.

Yes, therapeutic medications are used, just like in human sports, to help horses recover under strict veterinary guidance. But illegal drugs? Those are banned, and violations come with serious consequences.

Just like athletes, racehorses sometimes need meds to help them recover from injuries or soreness. But it's all done under strict vet supervision, and the rules ensure that no horse races with anything still in their system. HISA has really raised the bar on testing and regulations to keep everything transparent. Horses are tested regularly to make sure they're running clean.

STUCK ON WHAT TO SAY?

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

 www.lightupracing.com

TAG US ON SOCIALS

 @lightupracing