

The PR Stunt that Saved Batman for Generations

*By Frank Strong, Author of the blog,
[Sword and The Script](#)*



PR is a long term strategy. Relationships and reputations aren't built in days or even fiscal quarters and rebuilding a damaged brand can take years for a business. While reinvention is a timeless [public relations](#) positioning strategy, for [Batman](#) the process would take decades of passion, luck and a PR stunt.

A poor showing of Batman on television in 1966, would turn Michael Uslan into a generational hero of a different kind, according to the Marketplace story about a boy who saved Batman.

Amid “cheesy graphics” and a sloppy effort to render the comic book exclamations – “Pow!” “Zap!” and “Wham!” – into motion picture format...flopped. At the mere age of 14, Mr. Uslan “vowed” to one day redeem this humiliation and Batman's reputation.

The Comics Professor PR Stunt

Years later, as a college student at Indiana University, he developed a course on comic books. His pitch to the dean to accredit his course for an “experimental curriculum” seemed doomed until he compared comic books to mythology:

“Comic books and superheroes are our modern day mythology,”

says Mr. Uslan in the Marketplace story. "The ancient gods of Greece, Rome, Egypt all still exist, except today, they wear spandex and capes."

With his course accredited, the world's first-ever Professor of Comic Books promptly returned home and placed an anonymous call to a reporter at United Press International (UPI) with pretend agitation:

"I hear there's a course on comic books being taught at Indiana University. I'm a taxpayer in this state. They are using my money to teach our kids comic books?!"

Once he hung up, he says his phone began "to ring and never stopped." The evening news at major networks covered the story along with "virtually every newspaper in North America." Mr. Uslan says his classes were filled with reporters.

Dream Job with DC Comics

Two weeks later the noise from his PR stunt landed him a job with DC Comics...writing Batman comics. A conversation with management over the lack of public interest in Batman since his fall from TV grace, lead to the opportunity of a lifetime: Although still in his twenties, Mr. Uslan purchased the rights to Batman character.

Reinvention stories are usually overnight successes that took years to develop. Mr. Uslan spent a decade pitching "dark movies" – casting Batman in the likeness most of us might appreciate today before earning big screen interest. Still the rewards have been magnificent: Batman movies have earned billions in revenue.

"I got him [Batman] because nobody else on the planet earth wanted him," he says in the Marketplace story.

Beyond ingenuity and perhaps risk-taking, neither Batman nor Mr. Uslan have superpowers of which to speak. Indeed, PR isn't

magic either, but with consistency and time, it may well lead to a story for the ages.

About the Author: Frank Strong is a communications director with more than 15 years of experience in the high-tech sector. He previously served as director of public relations for Vocus, which developed marketing, PR and media monitoring software. He has held multiple roles both in-house with corporations, ranging from startups to global organizations, and with PR firms including the top 10 global firm Hill & Knowlton.