

Dear Santa:

As no doubt you have been monitoring my being naughty or being nice this year — which brings up a whole other thing about online and offline privacy, we can discuss that later though — I'd like to pose a question, does your standard for being good come strictly from the song, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town?" I ask because I want to be clear.

If this is the case, the concept of good seems to linked to the phrase "for goodness sake." So, being good is good because it's the right thing to do. Yes? The right thing to do?

In that vein, let me take this opportunity to talk to you a minute about your branding. Because why? Because it's the right thing to do.

I know, I know. Mrs. Claus probably has a cousin who has a bootleg copy of Photoshop 6 and has offered you a logo refresh for a midnight run with the reindder and sleigh. Or something like that. Ignore that. In the long term, it won't be worth the heartache and work involved.

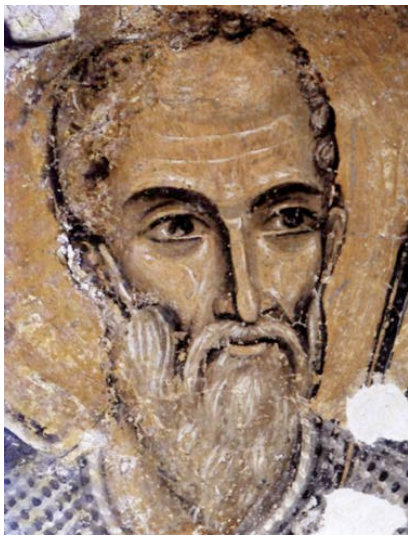
On a side note, the song in question indicates that I:

1. Better watch out,
2. Better not cry and
3. Better not pout

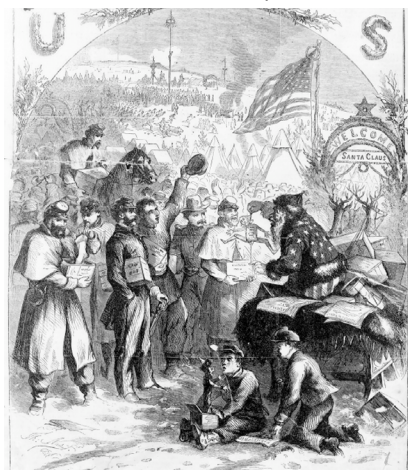
This year, I have followed these guidelines to a tee — though I did get misty-eyed during the Wayans Brothers' *Dance Flick*.

Let's start with where you've come from.

A medieval fresco depicting St Nicholas, a 4th-century Greek Christian bishop of Myra (now Demre) in Lycia



1863 illustration, Harper's Weekly



Now, I realize that your most recent creation is born equally of folklore and of commerce interests — though the notion that Coca-Cola Co. created your modern image pervades somehow.

It seems that you were much leaner and a bit more gruff looking in the 19th century. I know, I know. No one likes to see pictures of themselves

from over 140 years ago. But it's important that we see the whole of what we're working with. After all, where you've been is as important as where you're going.

One challenge I see immediately is that your image has not been licensed or trademarked. This means that any schlub with a twinkle in his/her eye, some age makeup and rosy cheeks could pass for jolly ol' Saint Nick.

Schlub, exhibit A



Schlub, exhibit B



Schlub, exhibit C



The paintings of you by Haddon Sundblom beginning in 1931 are iconic, no doubt, but in this age where everyone is underwritten by a corporate sponsor and product placement is rampant, let's fly solo. Differentiation is key.

Based on current trends, I'm going to recommend three things up-front:

1. Keep the name. Don't change it, it's a classic. But trademark it ASAP. (A quick search of the Trademark Electronic Search System indicates that no one's jumped on Santa or Santa Claus yet. Remarkable.)
2. Plan a mid-year event, remind people that you're still around in the summertime. Maybe a workshop on toy-making, maybe a charitable trip to some distressed part of the world. Utah, for example. Would be great for public relations.
3. Upgrade the tunes. "Up On The Housetop (Ho! Ho! Ho!)" was written in 1860, the aforementioned "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" in 1934, "Here Comes Santa Claus" in 1946. Even Gene Autry's topical song "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" came in 1949. Nothin' for 50 years? For shame. And "Santa Baby" doesn't count.

Christmas tunes get such a bad rap by default. People will thank you for it.



Quick. Before Lorne Michaels thinks of it.



Think of it as "A Charlie Brown Christmas" for the new millennia.

And these are just three top level action items. I think with a focused re-branding campaign, we can really make your identity sparkle and shine. Besides, everyone loves a success story.

I know a lot of people have said many things about you over the years — some misconstrued, some completely false. Let's set the record straight. And it's the right thing to do besides.

Most of all, I am a big fan. (I knew you were wicked solid long before you got me that remote controlled Audi Quattro for my 10th Christmas. The nickel cadmium rechargeable batteries were brilliant. Way ahead of the Save the Planet business and all the greenwashing.)

I'm looking forward to hearing from you. Let me know if you have any questions.

Happy Holidays, big guy.



Yes, my sister was scared of you. Pictures don't lie. Don't hold it against me now.



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