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FOOD & DRINK

The Taco Licker Who Fooled Us All

By [Mackenzie Yang](#) | June 04, 2013 | [Add a Comment](#)

In the latest it-must-be-true-because-there's-a-picture blunder, mainstream sites like [Mashable](#) and [Yahoo](#) helped stoke the collective social media uproar over a photo of a Taco Bell worker licking a towering stack of taco shells. The disturbing image, which was posted on [Facebook](#) Sunday and reportedly snapped at a Taco Bell in Ridgecrest, Calif., sparked a heated debate among commenters about whether the photo was “obviously done out of humor” and didn’t warrant “so much overreaction” or if it was just plain “irresponsible” and “defaming to the company.”

(MORE: [Taco Bell Courts Models with Gold Rings and Gift Cards](#))

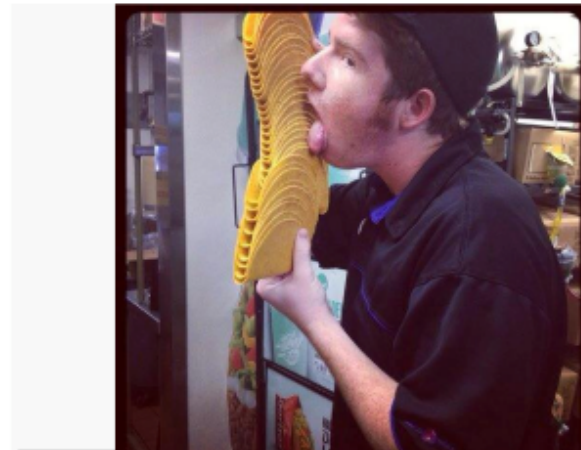
Turns out it was all a prank, albeit not one sanctioned by the chain, which has faced a series of P.R. nightmares in recent years. Soon after the photo went viral on Monday, Taco Bell suspended the employee shown licking the tacos and issued a [statement](#) explaining that the pose was meant as a joke: The picture was a submission for a photo contest calling for Taco Bell employees to show themselves enjoying the first bite of the product. The company insists the taco shells were “absolutely not” served to customers and were only used for training purposes in March.

Sadly, the incident is reminiscent of other embarrassments the chain has endured in recent years. Last summer, a worker at an Indiana Taco Bell [was fired](#) after he tweeted pictures of what appear to be him urinating on the food. And in 2007, [a video](#) showing [a rat](#) scampering around a Manhattan KFC-Taco Bell was widely aired on national TV. At the time, Taco Bell’s parent company, Yum Brands, apologized for the incident and said it would take measures to ensure that the health hazard did not happen again.

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