



DIMACast 329

March 4, 2013



**“United Breaks Guitars”
The Social Media Shift in Marketing
Dave Carroll, Sons of Maxwell
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada**



Musical Intro – Chorus from United Breaks Guitars by Dave Carroll

See Links at end of transcript for YouTube videos of all songs

Bill McCurry: Chances are, DIMACast listeners are part of the 13 million people who have heard the song *United Breaks Guitars*. The goal was a million people Dave Carroll?

Dave Carroll: It was but I promised 3 videos and in one year I hoped to get a million views on YouTube and the first one got a million in 4 days.

Bill McCurry: And you changed history for social media?

Dave Carroll: Some people say so. Yeah.

Bill McCurry: Do you think you changed social media?

Dave Carroll: I think I did in a certain way. I made a contribution to it. And my video became a metaphor for the ability of one person to make a change, how inexpensive it can be and the effects that it can have on a global basis.

Bill McCurry: Ok. For the two people maybe in the world left that haven't heard your story. What happened?

Dave Carroll: I was flying with United Airlines, ironically for the first time back in March 31st 2008 and I was going to Nebraska with my brother Don and our band's Sons of Maxwell and we were going to play a one-week tour there and when we landed in Chicago to deplane there was somebody looked outside the

window and said
"Oh My God they
are throwing
guitars outside".

And it turned out
that my Taylor

guitar was pretty
badly damaged and



United Breaks Guitars – Song 1, Introduced on 9th of July 2009 and was the top music YouTube video for the month – even though it was not up a full month. Dave says he knew if he wrote a good song, made a good quality production people would watch. The story, scripting, audio, video and post production are all outstanding. Check Out Song 1 at www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitars

I tried to get the airline to take responsibility and they wouldn't do it. I couldn't get any help that way and ultimately they said they weren't going to take any responsibility for it because I didn't open up a claim within 24 hours. And my response to that was to promise 3 music videos sharing my message about my bad experience with anyone who wanted to see it on YouTube and United Breaks Guitars is the first of that trilogy.

Bill McCurry: Four days a million people signed onto it.

Dave Carroll: Yep.

Bill McCurry: at the start you were surprised by the result.

Dave Carroll:

Shocked. I was pretty convinced I could get a million hits because I'd done a little bit of

research and I looked

on YouTube and I saw a lot of really bad quality videos, with bad content, bad audio, bad video. That were getting a lot of hits and so I thought what I could control was the content I knew if I tried my best I could probably write a good song if I made something that looked good and sounded good then surely with the



While the production was top notch it was also home spun adding to the charm of the entire experience. No question Dave is a story teller.

3 videos I could get a million I was convinced of that but what ended up happening is I got a million hits from people who believed passionately in the message and were actively sharing it with everybody else because they felt so strongly about it.

Bill McCurry: Is that because we've all been maligned by an airline in our life?

Dave Carroll: There's that element of relate-ability that everybody has had a bad experience with an airline and I think the fact that someone was able to take a very common problem and make the big airline take notice was vindicating for consumers everywhere.

Bill McCurry: Ok. Your budget was \$150 dollars.

Dave Carroll: Right.

Bill McCurry: And yet there is nobody who is going to look at that video and say that was \$150 dollar budget.

How do you reconcile that?

Dave Carroll: Well in some ways they will. In all the areas that it was my responsibility they would say it was probably a 150 dollar budget because I brought all the talent in and I

hired people who would work for free with no acting ability so that's clear. But the



Dave was able to enlist others who had common frustrations with the airlines. The donation of time and talent from 170 different friends, family and community made the series more impactful as a consumer revolt.

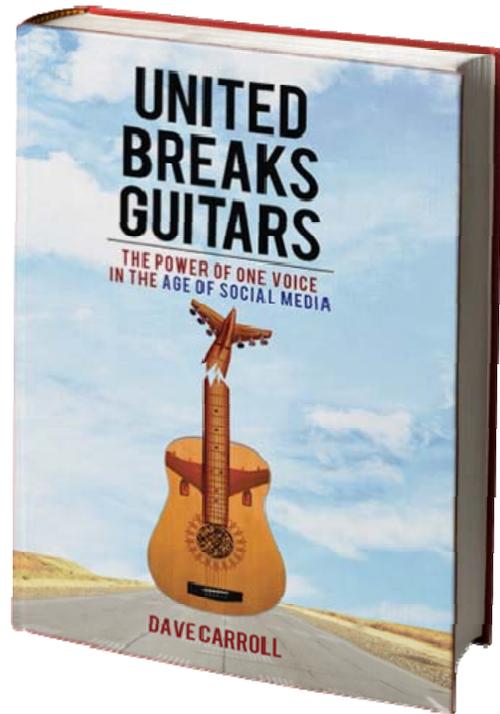
quality of the audio and the quality of the video are all very professional. I had professional musicians who took it seriously and a professional studio gave me a great audio and on the video side of things the company in Halifax that I called are friends of mine, Curve Productions, and Steve Richard, one of the co-owners, he owns a Red camera it's a digital, movie quality camera.

Bill McCurry: Yes it is.

Dave Carroll: So, in terms of our output, the content it was very, very strong and that's one mistake that some people think that because I say \$150 they are not really looking at the quality and they don't care about content. They say well I'll make a song while the

vacuum cleaner is going in the background and that sort of thing and they think it will just go viral. Make a viral video. And we got lucky but we controlled the things we could control.

Buy This Book!



Dave Carroll is such a straight up guy. He didn't try to pimp his book *United Breaks Guitars, The Power Of One Voice In The Age of Social Media*. Reward him for sharing insights that can help DIMAcast listeners instead of hawking books like most authors. Buy the book. If you don't learn something from it Bill McCurry will refund your money!

Bill McCurry: How do you get a hundred people to volunteer a whole day? How do you get a film crew to come out? How do you get a recording studio to give you that?

Dave Carroll: Because people were believing in the message. They believed in the story. The way it was playing out is I didn't take the compensation that



During the shooting of Song 2 volunteers gathered around the camera to review scenes. Dave says "People wanted to be part of it . . . the vibe wasn't angry and hateful and vengeful it was very encompassing and brought people together."

United had offered. There

was a ground swell of support around the world and people wanted to be part of it.

The vibe wasn't really angry and hateful and vengeful it was very encompassing

and it brought people together. And when you do that you use humor and

camaraderie and all that stuff it makes for something that people want to be a part

of and that's what the second video is all about

Bill McCurry: Because you brought a hundred people together.

Dave Carroll: There was a lot of people there and I had family members in there,

my grandmother who has since passed away she was in there I say all the time that

having those stories like my grandmother's in that video allows me to show my

young children their great-grandmother in a way that a normal picture will never

be able to bring
her to life the
way that video
does. So on a



Dave's Grandmother is circled - View Song #2 www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitars2
personal level that's the essence of United Breaks Guitars is all of these stories that
contributed to help me make this.

Bill McCurry: You didn't accept the fact that you changed social media; you're a
very humble guy. You're saying that other people have said that and yet you're the
magnet. Right?

Dave Carroll: uh-huh

Bill McCurry: Can somebody else plan to be a magnet like you did?

Dave Carroll: I think people are smart. You have this sort of a built-in compass
and that sort of thing and if you're not authentic I think people will smell that a
mile away. If you're doing it for the wrong reasons if you're motivated, if you're
trying to be famous people know that. And that's really not what I've been about.
It's never been what I've been about. I never wanted to be a musician for the fame
or the fortune I did it because it made me feel whole, I guess that's what I wanted
to do. And this whole United experience was never about elevating my own

personal brand it got pushed along with everybody else underneath me and all their stories

It's all about storytelling and that's what I've been. I haven't always realized that I tried to follow the path that in the music industry you know, write a song like this for the radio and it never worked out for me and I finally just accepted that my favorite songs in our son's Maxwell's 10 CD and my 2 originals are all the story songs that my favorite heroes are people like Harry Chapin who knew how to tell a story and loved their audiences and didn't worry if the songs were radio-length or anything like that. I'm a storyteller and I realized early on that for me to be authentic as I'm sharing my story just tell it as it happens. Tell the story of United Beaks Guitars to people and it comes across very powerfully to most audiences because I'm not trying to pretend to be anything I'm not.

Bill McCurry:

So, if you go
down to these
same people and
said you wanted
to do a video
about Dave



A scene from Song #2 – We won't be a spoiler . . . just warning you don't quit early – watch to the very end of the video . . . it will be worth your time. We will tell you to watch this scene carefully. As the actors leave the scene Dave's grandma got confused so he had to rush her out of the scene. It was the end of the day and they didn't have enough Nova Scotia light left for another shoot.

Carroll's songs would
you get the same
support?

Dave Carroll: No.

Because at that point
you're saying to people
do you want to give up
a day of your life and



Speaking of support . . . To shoot the people as a guitar on the grass they needed a scissors lift. The Halifax company that rents them was excited to donate its use to be part of *United Breaks Guitars*.

your talent and your ability for free so somebody else can make money off it? And I haven't made much money if any off of *United Breaks Guitars* itself and I didn't understand how to monetize videos. I wasn't prepared for it. There's a lot of things I could have done differently and you hear about people who make viral videos who make a pile of money. Some of it involves putting advertising right on the thing and they're just quirky, campy videos but I didn't want to do that. They are the videos. I didn't put advertising right on them because it sullies the whole thing to me and so I've done well compared to what I was doing before as a speaker and I'm building a business in different directions because of *United Breaks Guitars* but I've never monetized that for profit and I think that's partially to honor the people who donated all their services

technology and they're used to the old school way of doing things and it's hard to adopt new technologies and things. Their initial reaction would be to consider me and my story as a cautionary tale about how to fear your customer and it validates their thinking about why you should try to control more and more. Other

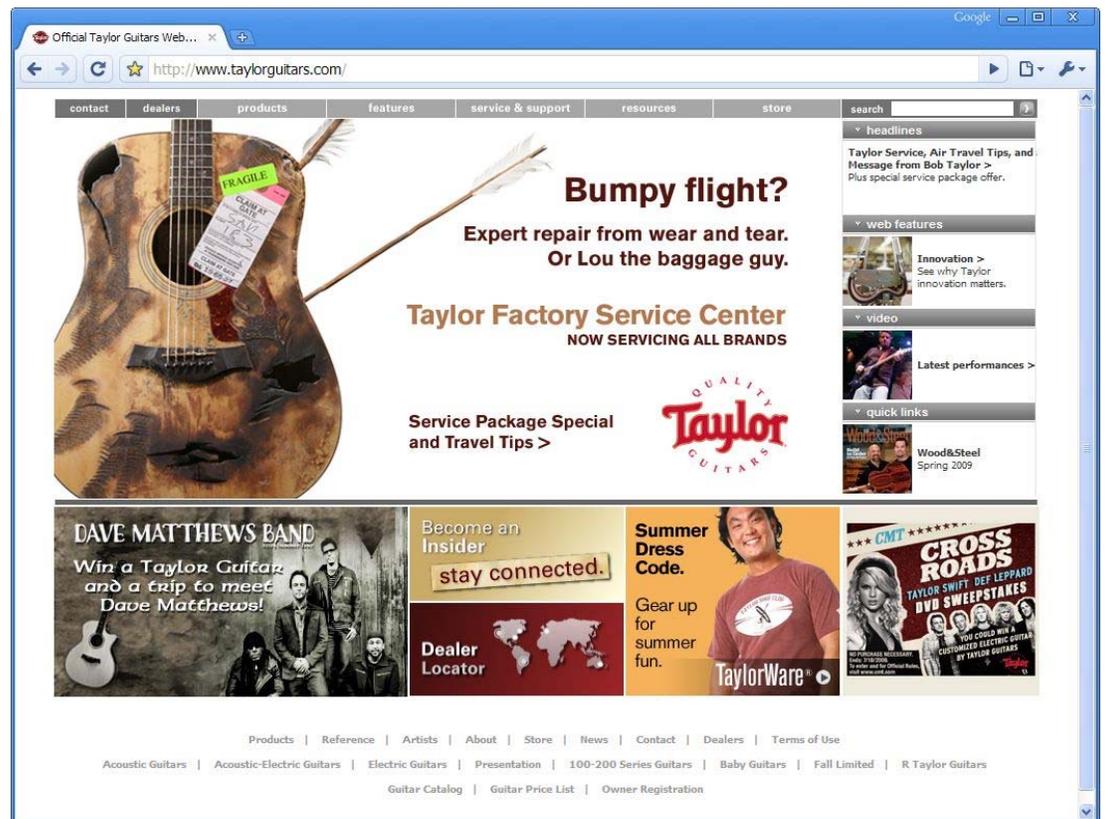
Bill McCurry: Now you make a point that social media controls the brand. The company doesn't anymore?

Dave Carroll: Yes.

Bill McCurry: And yet you also say through this experience you've got a company like Taylor who maximized it and you've got a company like United who blew it.

Dave Carroll:

Well, they embraced social media. It's all about how I think companies embrace social media



or they fear. If

Taylor Guitars instantly responded to the customer interest. Bob Taylor posted his own YouTube video for guitar owners, whether they owned Taylor or other guitars. You can view that video at (www.TinyURL.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsTaylor)

you were to ask them what's your initial reaction to social media. There are a lot of companies that are run by older people that may get brand new. Other companies and other people are seeing it more as an opportunity and once if you see it as an opportunity you'll

get back what you see, it reflects back your perspective and so your opportunity is really based on



how you see

This scene alone from Song #2 tells you everyone had fun. Low production costs, high enjoyment for viewer and cast and production crew.

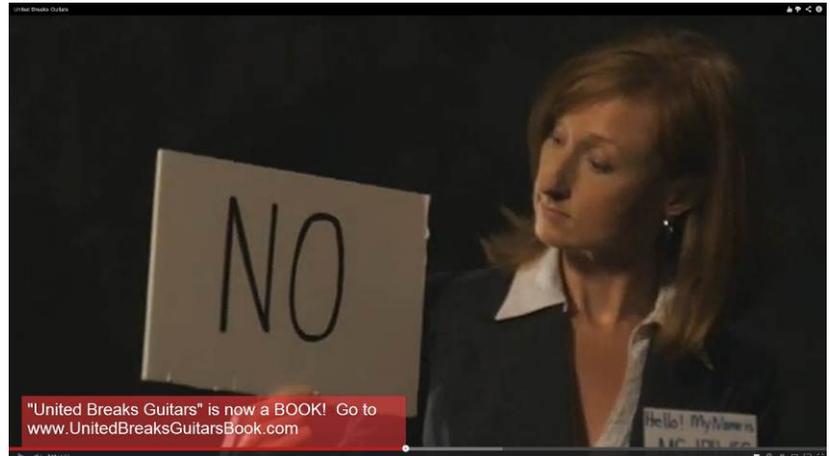
things in life and social media. The opportunity for people that see it as co-creating their experience are getting that benefit. That's exactly what Taylor Guitar did.

They said millions of people are looking at our brand how are we going to share our story with those people and they did some very wise things. My video did not increase their sales by 25% in a year but my video allowed them to make use of all these extra millions of sets of eyes and show people their story and share their story with them that made people want to buy Taylor. I got emails from people that just said Dave I saw your video. Love the story. I don't even play guitar but I want

to buy a Taylor. And that's what you want people walking around saying. If I ever buy a guitar I want a Taylor.

Bill McCurry: OK but Taylor did more than just put up a fancy web page.

Dave Carroll: Well they have somebody that watches their social media. They would be engaging people on their Facebook. They use everything that they've got to complement their social media. They have a magazine



called Wood & Steele (<https://www.taylorguitars.com/wood-and-steel>) and there's a form in there that people can write in to Bob Taylor in this magazine and he responds to them the editor and whatever questions they pick handfuls of them and that would be reflected I'm sure in their social media. They integrate it so that they understand social media is one aspect but it's got to complement their magazine. Everyone's saying the same story their story is the same it's consistent from top to bottom that everything they're doing is in line with their core messaging.

So Bob Taylor when he made his video while United Breaks Guitars was going viral they realized that all these people were looking at their company so

Bob went on and he made a video that had people in the workshops making the Taylors and he talked about that. He referenced my video but he also gave useful information and this is really key because I think if you're going to ask people to take time out of their busy day to spend any time with you, you have to give them something back and he realized that so he said I'm going to give these people some useful information and he printed off a form from the TSA and held it up and said this is a form from the TSA and if you're a traveling musician or if you travel with your guitar whether it's a Taylor or not this is what you can tell anybody it says you cannot bring your guitar on a plane in the United States because the TSA said you could. So, in the mean time they are absorbing some branding, some information about Taylor and they are also learning something as guitar players so they walk away enriched with more information and exposed to what Taylor is doing and that combination allowed for their brand to be promoted.

Bill McCurry: United refused you compensation and then when it went viral they offered you compensation.

Dave Carroll: Right.

Bill McCurry: What'd you do?

Dave Carroll: They called on the same day that it hit a million and we were talking on the phone and they said it was regretful what happened but they would like to offer 1,200 dollars in flight vouchers and 1,200 in cash and though they

arrived at those figures because of what I had asked the airline was for 1,200 dollars in flight vouchers because I had paid that much in cash to fix the guitar with someone who really spent some time and did a good job repairing it and the 1,200 in cash I don't know why they added that on but that was the offer and they said they are not doing this because I had a viral video they would do this for any customer.

Bill McCurry:

Even though they denied-denied-denied-denied.

Dave Carroll:

And waited seven months and never got back to me and the video went up then 3 days later they



The graphics and sets were not outlandish . . . the audio was crystal clear, the exposures were sharp, lighting was superb, backgrounds were carefully controlled. Proof that good camera skills and post production will trump cash in making a video watchable. (This very memorable scene is from Song #2) After seeing this simple scene you will never forget the name of the video or what United Airlines is accused of.

called and so it was an ingenuine comment and I wasn't going to accept it anyway because as I explained to them the videos weren't a negotiation tactic. These were never to be to bully or intimidate them into doing what I thought was the right thing. They had closed the chapter on that so I said my three videos were going to

be the reaction to do something when they chose to do nothing. And the second

song had already been written I had performed it a couple of times and I said so the first video is up the second video is coming all 3 videos are coming. The second song is written so you can't change that. The third song is completely unwritten yet and I gave them an opportunity to engage and to be part of that. I said if you would like to take the

policy that you are going to change or have changed because

or since the video came out I would be glad to write about it and I will include you I will send you the song you can comment on it and we can sort of write it together and they listened to me but they didn't do anything and they never did get back to me and so the third song wraps up the trilogy and I think it does it fairly but it's not a co-write with United Airlines.

Bill McCurry: The songs are not vindictive.



<http://www.communityguy.com/2009/08/26/the-united-breaks-guitars-effect/> found this luggage tag on a guitar at an American Airlines counter. The owner said she's afraid to fly United Airlines. What impact will Dave Carroll's experience have on United over the years?

Dave Carroll: No. Nothing about this was vindictive it was not hateful in any way and I don't hate United Airlines and I never did. I was most frustrated before I made the commitment to do all this. Everything changed from the time when I was a customer in a maze to somebody who's reclaimed the power. I said I'm going to do something and at that point I stopped being frustrated by it all and I approached it creatively as a song writer I said now I'm going to be out of this I'm going to make 3 new songs. I felt good about it I was laughing when I wrote the first song. It was making me laugh and it had that same effect with everybody else and from then on there was no deadlines there was nothing work related never felt like work it was just bringing people together and we had a great time and their



brand suffered a little bit from it I don't know if you can

We won't steal the plotline of Song #2 – United could have helped co-write Song #3 which might have had a different ending based on this song. Alas, United stayed consistently out of touch.

quantify but it didn't help them for sure but it also never attacked them personally. It pointed out a flaw in a lot of big business using them as a metaphor.

Bill McCurry: If I'm managing or owning a business what lesson can I learn from United?

Dave Carroll: I've kind of discovered there's a huge difference between the companies who try and get it right say 98% of the time and the ones who try to get it right 100% of the time. The ones who try to get it right all of the time are like all companies they're going to have their own customer service failures from time to time but the way, just the mentality on how they respond to customer service failures is quite different than the ones who try to get it right 98% of the time and that's because it's abhorrent to think that somebody, one of your customers is unhappy. Those 100% companies they wake up at night thinking about that they want to fix that because they understand the value of it and they take it on a personal level they invest themselves they care about every aspect of their business and it's infectious the caring goes everywhere in your business and it changes how you respond to everybody.

Bill McCurry: So management says 2% failure rate or 2% bad service is acceptable your premise is that allows us to give lousy service.

Dave Carroll: if you say 2% is acceptable failure then you'll achieve at least that much and I think the tone at your annual general meeting you may have 2 companies could have 98% satisfaction but one of them might say congratulations everybody we got it almost all right and the other would say congratulations everybody but we did pretty good but we still have 2% that we have to do better for and the rest of your AGM the conversation you have after that would be

completely different. So it starts at the same premise two companies have troubles but how you respond to them going forward completely different.

Bill McCurry: So you're looking good enough versus continuing to grow and do better?

Dave Carroll: Yeah. And to excel. You should always be trying to the very best you can and I believe in companies trying to make a profit but always in the service of others never at their expense.

The way I look at it, caring is something that it takes personal responsibility for it's not something you have a policy for and when that's tried it fails every time. People can smell inauthenticity a mile away. So it has to start at the top I think to be successful through the whole culture. It can start any one employee can have a ripple effect of caring they might

not be able to influence the entire culture but If you have a company that's run by a boss or owner or whoever it is if they actually care about the products they make they have to care about the people who are making them first and they have to care about the suppliers and they have to care about themselves. And this whole thing



Song #3 shows Dave's talent as story teller and musician. It's not the same musical genre you'll have to listen at www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitars3

about caring you can find it in the bible or all these ancient texts it's a spiritual idea but it's applicable to the business world.

Bill McCurry: What did Ford do with social media?

Dave Carroll: I love this story. Ford is an example of a huge company that understands the opportunity that social media affords, no pun intended, and Scott Monty is a speaker and social media leader at Ford and he was explaining that Ford wanted to promote the Fiesta line of cars and they felt first of all that they had a really strong product the engineers did a great job and they thought they had a winner. So that's the first thing you have to understand is that you can't engage an audience with an inferior product.

Ford gave a pile of these cars to Americans across America and they said live with these cars for a while and enjoy them and drive them and experience them and tell everybody what you think about them. They weren't surprised that people loved the cars but they were surprised that there were innovations that they hadn't thought of and they were able to crowd source as they say, the innovations that they ended up incorporating into the car. the drink holder was one thing that moved and they reengineered that and at the end of the day they had a car that they felt really answered what the demand would be for a car like that and the result was that when it was, come time to release it they had 10,000 advanced orders for the Fiesta and they didn't have to use any of the traditional media, millions of

dollars in expensive print ads and that sort of thing to promote the car. They let word of mouth do it. Instead of fearing customers and saying well what if they don't like it. They'll tell everybody.

They understood that by giving a product most people would really like, uh, they would end up having,

uh, good people talking and being engaged and want the car to be

better. You want your customers to want you to be better and to help you and that's what the Ford customers did they helped them for free be better.

Bill McCurry: Dave Carroll thank you very much

Dave Carroll: Thanks Bill.

- End of Interview -

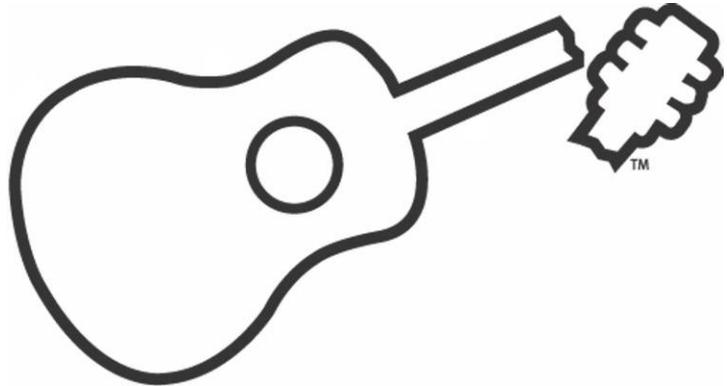
Notes from Bill – to better understand this “history in the making” review the following comments and videos.

- Be ready to smile.
- Be ready for entertainment.
- Be ready to learn

Ask yourself how you could use in your career the different lessons of

- Dave Carroll
- United Airlines
- Taylor Guitar

What long term damage will this incident cause United Airlines and the entire airline industry? Today airlines are legally protected from consumers for cancelled flights, delayed/lost bags, atrocious service. Will one of the kids who grew up



In his book Dave describes this as “The icon that opens doors for me; it has become the perfect image for my company, Big Break Enterprises Inc. (Trademark of Dave Carroll)

singing this song become a legislator and cast the deciding vote that airlines should no longer be sheltered from consumers? What will be the long term effect of social media of this type?

What about in your company or your career?

Want To Better Understand United Breaks Guitars, The Power Of One?

The **Three Music Videos** are here – besides the 13 million plus hits on these versions alone, check out the number of comments . . . and the myriad “repostings” of these videos

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitars

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitars2

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitars3

Explanatory statement made by Dave Carrol as video was going viral

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsstatement

News media coverage

www.TinyURL.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsCBS

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsCNN

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsInterview

Dave’s message was given credibility over time – such as Columbia Business School’s video

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsColumbia

Taylor Guitar provided information and possible solutions – their sales rose 25% annually – was it due to United Breaks Guitars and their social media response?

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsTaylor

when you’re a social media hit, you’re up for parody – Warning: Hitler uses foul language

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsparody

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsHitler

Dave even did a parody on himself to announce his book, titled, what else? United Breaks Guitars

www.TinyURL.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsBook

If you’re a brand manager how will you change your brand perception as these children grow to become consumers. If they’ve been singing United Breaks Guitars at this age, how will they embrace your brand? How will they respond as voters when legislators favor airlines over consumers?

www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitarsStudents
www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitars3yroid
www.TinyUrl.com/UnitedBreaksGuitars2yroid

If you appreciate Dave's music check out www.DaveCarrol.com –

If you appreciate First Responders, those folks who always come when you call 911, Dave has done a tribute to them. You'll find it at www.911song.com

We would appreciate hearing your ideas, suggestions or comments . . .

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