

## NAVIGATING PUBLIC RELATIONS CRISES: THE CHIPOTLE E. COLI OUTBREAK

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## Introduction

In 1993, a small burrito shop opened up in Denver, Colorado and took the first step toward launching an empire. Chipotle Mexican Grill founder Steve Ells started his business as a short-term project to raise funds for his dream of establishing a Michelin star restaurant, but 25 years later, Ells's small burrito shop expanded to 2,300 locations worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Today, Chipotle is the sixth largest fast-food chain in the world, but the company's rise has been far from smooth.<sup>2</sup> Chipotle describes its company's core values as "Real is better. Better for You, Better for People, Better for Our Planet. It may be the hard way to do things, but it's the right way."<sup>3</sup> Chipotle prides itself on its fresh, sustainable Mexican-inspired offerings, but in 2015, the face of Mexican fast-food faced a crisis. An *E. coli* outbreak left 55 infected, 22 of which were hospitalized, and severely damaged the reputation of Chipotle.<sup>4</sup> Despite this food safety concern threatening its name, Chipotle eventually recovered and blossomed with a gradual yet successful comeback. Apart from its lack of thorough, tailored and well-timed messaging, Chipotle's actions exemplify corporate resilience and retention of public trust through marketing, communications and public relations campaigns.

## Situational Background

Beginning October 2015, Oregon and Washington state health officials received notice of two reported cases of *Escherichia coli* O26, better known as *E. coli*, infections resulting from the consumption of food served at Chipotle Mexican Grill. The spread of *E. coli* is commonly linked to the slaughtering of cattle and processing of ground beef as a result of the animal's intestinal *E. coli* bacteria contaminating the raw meat product.<sup>5</sup> In addition to beef, the bacteria are also frequently found latching themselves onto fresh produce and unpasteurized dairy products, all of which Chipotle offers in its restaurants. On average, human consumption of such bacterial contamination likely results in a Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) infection three to four days following digestion of the germ. Common infection symptoms include diarrhea, bloody stool or abdominal cramps, and in serious cases, the risk for a form of kidney failure called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Whitten, Sarah. "Steve Ells Wanted to Open a Fine-Dining Restaurant, Instead He Built a Burrito Empire." CNBC. CNBC, November 29, 2017. <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/11/29/how-steve-ells-built-chipotle-mexican-grill-into-a-burrito-empire.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Reiff, Nathan. "10 Biggest Restaurant Companies." Investopedia. Investopedia, July 28, 2021. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/markets/012516/worlds-top-10-restaurant-companies-mcdsbux.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> "Our Values." Chipotle. Accessed October 10, 2021. <https://www.chipotle.com/values>.

<sup>4</sup> Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. "FDA Investigates an Outbreak Linked to Chipotle Mexican Grill." U.S. Food and Drug Administration. FDA, 2016. <https://www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/fda-investigates-multistate-outbreak-e-coli-o26-infections-linked-chipotle-mexican-grill-restaurants>.

<sup>5</sup> Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. (2020, October 10). *E. Coli*.

Mayo Clinic. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/e-coli/symptoms-causes/syc-20372058>.

<sup>6</sup> Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

As of November 2015, the restaurant chain and public health officials agreed to shut down the operations of 43 restaurant locations between the aforementioned states, in addition to others along the West Coast, as numerous outbreaks of norovirus and salmonella were also linked to eating at Chipotle locations across the country. Following procedural checkpoints of food safety testing in compliance with local health officials and the FDA, Chipotle found no conclusive traces of the *E. coli* bacteria in any particular ingredient. The company reopened all 43 locations at the latter end of that same month. However, come December 2015, another *E. coli* outbreak occurred in North Dakota, Kansas and Oklahoma Chipotle locations as well as a norovirus outbreak at a Boston College restaurant, infecting 120 students. As Chipotle engaged in structural business and operational changes, reports of *E. coli* infections concluded in February 2016, declaring the outbreak officially over. The aftermath of this national corporation's food safety crisis amounted to a total of 55 reports of *E. coli* infections in 11 U.S. states. Of the 55 cases, there were 21 reported hospitalizations and no reports of HUS or fatal infections.<sup>7</sup>

### **Crisis Management and Strategies**

Ells admitted that the company was not prepared to tackle this crisis, but the 2015 outbreaks forced the burrito chain to develop its crisis mitigation plan. Chipotle faced a major threat to its reputation as a result of its offerings causing infections and hospitalizations, calling for a fast and authoritative response. One of the ways Chipotle responded was by harnessing the “goodwill” it had built up among its consumers over the years.<sup>8</sup> Chipotle has constantly worked to serve its customers—first and foremost. For example, in 2015, when Chipotle's routine audit found that one of its major pork suppliers was not meeting its standard of animal welfare, it took carnitas off the menu.<sup>9</sup> The Chipotle team has a track record of going out of its way to do things *right*, thus establishing consumer trust around the Chipotle brand. From its start, Chipotle has been concerned about morality. For that reason, the company has now partnered with Niman Ranch, which raises pigs in the most ethical and sustainable way possible.<sup>10</sup> The restaurant chain has committed to acquiring its ingredients without taking shortcuts, setting a strong reputational foundation from the onset of the *E. coli* outbreaks. Over the years, several corporate social responsibility actions the company took—both during and after the crisis—enhanced this sturdy reputation even further. Chipotle even put a monetary donation toward its mission of

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2015, November 20). *Escherichia coli O26 infections linked to Chipotle Mexican Grill Restaurants (Final update)*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved October 3, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/2015/o26-11-15/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, Geoff. “Chipotle's E. Coli Crisis: P.R. Experts Say It's Handling It Right.” *Forbes*. *Forbes Magazine*, November 5, 2015. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/geoffwilliams/2015/11/04/can-chipotle-survive-its-e-coli-crisis-pr-experts-seem-to-think-so-and-offer-advice/?sh=3ee24d188605>.

<sup>9</sup> Raz, Guy. “Chipotle: Steve Ells (2017).” *NPR*. *NPR*, January 4, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/22/949258959/chipotle-steve-ells-2017>.

<sup>10</sup> “Niman Ranch Co-Op & Chipotle Story.” *Chipotle Farmers Market*. Accessed October 10, 2021. <https://farmersmarket.chipotle.com/pages/niman-ranch>.

rehabilitating its food safety by investing \$10 million toward helping small local farmers meet the new safety standards, which helped boost the company's reputation despite its own issues.<sup>11</sup>

Chipotle took fairly swift and voluntary action in addressing the emerging E. coli issues across nationwide restaurant locations. Chipotle issued an immediate response to the E.coli outbreak.<sup>12</sup> Following the initial two outbreaks, Chipotle hired health officials to investigate the restaurant's link to the infection cases. The chain closed 43 stores to locate and eliminate the source of the bacterial problem. Chipotle ordered a deep-clean of its restaurants and distribution centers, and the company hired two safety firms to address and assess any issues with its food safety process. Chipotle also recalled nearly 170,000 pounds of meat and released a statement promising it would do better in its continued push of high quality food standards.<sup>13</sup> The Chipotle leadership team looked into every single menu offering and its ingredients to ensure there are a number of interventions in place to stop any possible bacterial contamination. Following the implementation of new food safety procedures, Chipotle now blanches its avocados, lemons, limes, and peppers even after washing them to try and make sure that the chance of a pathogen reaching the Chipotle service line is as close to zero as possible.<sup>14</sup> Chipotle also retrained all of its employees on food safety and requires that employees take a quarterly food safety class.<sup>15</sup> Although proper structural actions were taken to address the issues internally, many of these updates failed to be communicated to key publics. In many cases, the media had to stand in as an intervening public to communicate the changes being made. After all, communication lies at the core of crisis navigation. While Chipotle did reach some of its publics using earned and owned media, it took over a year for Chipotle to launch a campaign to regain customer trust.

In addition to operational changes, Chipotle also created an integrated marketing and communications campaign aimed at regaining customers' trust. Ells, Chipotle's founder, narrated a video posted on Chipotle's social media feeds, detailing how the company was working on improving its food safety protocol.<sup>16</sup> The video clearly breaks down Chipotle's steps in oversimplified language, communicating the company's food safety changes to consumers in layman's terms. In tandem with its social media posts, Chipotle also launched the "For Real" campaign in April 2017, which centered around the company's use of fresh and real ingredients every day. Chipotle is not like other fast-food chains; it does not pre-cook its food before it enters the store. At Chipotle, customers can see into the open kitchen with employees cooking

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<sup>11</sup> Watrous, Monica. "Chipotle Spills the Beans on New Food Safety Measures." Food Business News RSS. Food Business News, February 2, 2016. <https://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/7400-chipotle-spills-the-beans-on-new-food-safety-measures>.

<sup>12</sup> Madhani, Aamer. "More Chipotle E. Coli Cases Confirmed in Ore., Wash." USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, November 4, 2015. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2015/11/03/chipotle-e-coli-washington-oregon-lawsuit/75095214/>.

<sup>13</sup> Madhani, *USA Today*.

<sup>14</sup> Raz, *NPR*.

<sup>15</sup> Peterson, Hayley. "Chipotle Is Requiring All Employees to Take a Quarterly Food-Safety Test after Its Latest Illness Outbreak That Sickened 650 People." Business Insider. Business Insider, August 17, 2018. <https://www.businessinsider.com/chipotle-illness-outbreak-employees-must-take-food-safety-test-2018-8>.

<sup>16</sup> Chipotle [@chipotletweets]. "Chipotle Delivers on Food Safety. Watch Chipotle founder Steve Ells explain the program.!" Twitter, 21 September 2016, <https://twitter.com/ChipotleTweets/status/778609918320316416?s=20>

the chicken, steak and carnitas as well as shredding cheese, dicing peppers and smashing avocados all in real-time.<sup>17</sup> This is unique to Chipotle, and thus, ideal for capitalizing on the company's efforts to serve its customers *real* food made the *right* way in the "For Real" campaign. The campaign included signage, such as in-store posters and other print marketing materials, about how Chipotle uses a total of 51 ingredients devoid of any chemical or unnatural product that the average customer would not find in his/her/their own kitchen (See Appendix A).<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, the "For Real" campaign trails on the "goodwill" that Chipotle had previously garnered from its customers as it focuses on being transparent and true. The signage featured in the campaign was designed to put customers at ease. Its graphics and slogan, "The only ingredient that's hard to pronounce at Chipotle is Chipotle," served as marketing tactics intended to provide both comedic and food safety-related relief.<sup>19</sup> At the onset of the E. coli outbreaks, Chipotle undoubtedly neglected proper food safety protocol, sending the company into a nationwide crisis. So, the restaurant chain had to fall back on its mission, emphasizing how its food is fresher and, ultimately, better than its competitors.

Chipotle continued this thematic messaging around *real* food with its "As Real As It Gets" campaign, also in 2017, highlighting Chipotle's mission of cultivating and serving clean food. The goal of the campaign was to demonstrate how "Chipotle has championed quality ingredients and the use of local, organically grown produce" amid a culture of genetic modification and other food shortcuts.<sup>20</sup> Pushing toward the next chapter in the company's history, Chipotle aimed to prove how fast-food could be different. Chipotle created advertisements to support its arguments with endorsements from highly regarded celebrities, like Sam Richardson, Jillian Bell and John Mulaney.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, the company also released videos showing how its food is made, alluding to its continuous transparency with all of its key stakeholders. Regardless of the millions of impressions this campaign yielded, the "For Real" and "As Real As It Gets" campaigns distract from the reality of food safety crises that led to cases as serious as E. coli and norovirus infections. The company's success in terms of the communications campaigns' metrics by no means reflect the unfulfilled duty of Chipotle to continue its efforts to combat food safety concerns across its restaurant chain. Committing to serving real food starts with eliminating food safety concerns.

Chipotle's three-pronged public relations strategy combined its history of being a sustainable company, a swift and transparent response from top-level executives and a creative campaign tapping into the company's sense of humor. Altogether, the three of these strategies helped to stabilize and continue the gradual, upward trajectory of Chipotle's business despite the E. coli outbreaks. The E. coli crisis would have left many companies bankrupt or with a destroyed sense of credibility, but Chipotle's history of putting customers first helped retain its

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<sup>17</sup> Raz, *NPR*.

<sup>18</sup> Shaffer, Erica. "Chipotle Continues Brand Rehab with New Campaign." MEAT+POULTRY RSS, September 13, 2021. <https://www.meatpoultry.com/articles/20204-chipotle-continues-brand-rehab-with-new-campaign>.

<sup>19</sup> Shaffer, *Meat+Poultry*.

<sup>20</sup> "Chipotle Keeps It Real with Launch of Ad Campaign Focused on Real Ingredients." *Chipotle*, April 10, 2017. Chipotle. <https://ir.chipotle.com/news-releases?item=122408>.

<sup>21</sup> Chipotle, *Chipotle Keeps it Real*.

target audience. Ultimately, Chipotle ignited a campaign to remind everyone of the principles that the beloved Mexican grill giant was founded on: real and sustainable food.

### Outcomes

Amid the E. coli outbreak, Chipotle appeared in dozens of headlines from major nationwide outlets, like The New York Times and Business Insider, to more niche trade publications, such as Delish and the Food Poison Journal. Even expert sources, including the FDA and CDC, reported on the food-borne illnesses emerging from the consumption of Chipotle menu items. Negative media attention began to circulate rumors about the source of the bacterial contamination in Chipotle's ingredients. For example, an *Eater* article titled, "Chipotle Reportedly Believes Its E. Coli Outbreak Came From Australian Beef," instigates debate around the topic. This story not only sparks more negative public discourse but also pins Chipotle's corporate leadership's speculation of the beef product against the CDC's suspicion of the produce. Suggestive headlines like these often spark further discussion about the outbreaks and evoke fear in its readership—7.82 million unique monthly visitors wide—full of Chipotle's key consumer publics.<sup>22</sup>

While many of these headlines brought Chipotle's reputation into question, most of the media sources followed the crisis through, making readers aware of when the restaurant was safe again. The media, among federal expert sources, served as a key intervening public that guided readers' perceptions amid the series of health crises at Chipotle. Major national news outlets, such as NBC News, acted as an impartial, transparent source of information for its audience to follow Chipotle's update on its crisis management—both good and bad. In doing so, the media organization captured its readers' trust and was able to help restore Chipotle's credibility as the E. coli outbreaks came to a halt. During the early stages of the crisis, on November 20, 2015, NBC published the headline, "E. Coli Outbreak Linked to Chipotle Expands to 6 States". It's straight news. It dives into the scary yet factual reality, yet the story also serves as a meaningful earned media opportunity for Chipotle's crisis communications efforts with a reassuring quote from a corporate spokesperson.<sup>23</sup>

As NBC continued to follow up on the ongoing story, it culminated over a year later, on February 1, 2016, with the promising headline, "Back to Burritos: Chipotle-Linked E. Coli Outbreak Over, CDC Says". The article points out that in light of the static concerns that surround food safety, Chipotle will ultimately recover. Chipotle's consumer base will disregard the restaurant's tarnished reputation as long as it means they can return to their favorite restaurant—somewhat safely. NBC shared a statement from Bonnie Riggs, a restaurant industry analyst at NPD Group, a market research company, about Chipotle's recovery. "Young adults represent the largest share of Chipotle's overall traffic," said Riggs. "Their willingness to overlook any food safety concerns to eat at Chipotle could be a result of unabashed loyalty or

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<sup>22</sup> *Eater: Online/Digital*. Muck Rack. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://muckrack.com/media-outlet/eater>.

<sup>23</sup> The Associated Press. "E. Coli Outbreak Linked to Chipotle Expands to 6 States." NBC News. NBCUniversal News Group, November 23, 2015. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/e-coli-outbreak-linked-chipotle-expands-6-states-n467281>.

lack of awareness.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the outlet again painted the corporate leadership team in a positive light when covering the restaurant’s next steps to properly train and support its employees nationwide. In many cases, the media is made out to be incriminating for nationwide business crises. For example, a recent *Eat This, Not That* exposé titled, “Workers Reveal the Reasons Behind Rampant Food Safety Issues at This Chain,” uncovers that Chipotle insists that sick employees still come into work and enforce handwashing only during health inspections.<sup>25</sup> However, as an intervening public, media outlets, like NBC, helped maximize positive earned media opportunities for Chipotle and extended its message of transparency and optimism.

Come 2015, Chipotle had lost much of its credibility it had worked so hard to earn on its mission to better its people and planet with *real* food. As for consumers, a testimonial from Alec Fradkin, who was infected and hospitalized after consuming a meal from Chipotle contaminated with *E. coli*, reveals the decline in consumer trust. “I didn’t see anything in the news before eating there, but I saw the news about the outbreak the day after,” said Fradkin in regard to his concerns. “I was worried about it and ultimately got sick.” Yet, in time, through Chipotle’s crisis mitigation strategies, Fradkin speaks to how the corporation regained his trust amid the recurring bacterial issues, “I decided to work there after the fact,” said Fradkin. “I was always addicted to their food, so I wanted to see how it was made and was curious about the restaurant behind the scenes. After seeing the new safety requirements, I can guarantee that the place has made the changes to prevent *E. coli* outbreaks from ever happening again.”

Additionally, the fluctuation in the Chipotle Mexican Grill, Inc. (CMG) stock highlights the trust of shareholders, another key public. Prior to the outbreaks, the CMG stock spiked on August 2, 2015, with each share valued at \$749.12 before beginning its steep decline that November, dropping to \$536.19 on November 15, 2015, and down to \$413.19 per share by January 3, 2016. The following year showed small peaks and valleys for the CMG stock, and it wasn’t until mid-2017, following the *real* food campaigns, that the company entered a true financial recovery period. On May 7, 2017, CMG began its slow recuperation process as it rose to a price of \$489.33 per share (See Appendix B).<sup>26</sup>

In an approximate four-year recovery phase through 2019, Chipotle’s C-suite employed strategies to drive recovery and introduce a soft rebrand. The business revenue increased by 10.4% to \$1.23 billion, which allowed for \$100 million to be put toward buying back shares and boosting Chipotle’s stock value. The “For Real” campaign, yielding millions of impressions, allowed for the burrito chain’s gradual recovery to take off. Its focus on “back to basics” ingredients spiraled into further business innovation. Menu additions, like salad and quesadillas, as well as slight price increases, helped the business reach success it had not seen even before the

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<sup>24</sup> Whitten, Sarah, and CNBC. “Back to Burritos: Chipotle-Linked *E. Coli* Outbreak over, CDC Says.” NBC News. NBCUniversal News Group, February 1, 2016. <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/consumer/back-burritos-chipotle-linked-e-coli-outbreak-over-cdc-says-n508706>.

<sup>25</sup> Dominko, Mura. “Chipotle Workers Reveal Reasons behind Rampant Food Safety Issues.” *Eat This, Not That*. *Eat This, Not That*, May 24, 2021. <https://www.eatthis.com/news-workers-reveal-reasons-behind-chipotle-food-safety-issues/>.

<sup>26</sup> “CMG Interactive Stock Chart | Chipotle Mexican Grill, Inc. Stock.” Yahoo! Finance. Yahoo! Accessed October 5, 2021. <https://finance.yahoo.com/quote/CMG?p=CMG>.

E. coli outbreaks hit headlines.<sup>27</sup> While the Mexican grill giant eventually regained control over the media's narrative, trust of its consumers and the investments from its shareholders, Chipotle failed. It relied too heavily on its strong establishment as well as the forgiving and forgetting nature of its stakeholders over time.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Although gradual and, in some cases, arguably lacking thorough communication with key publics, Chipotle came back even stronger than before. As mentioned earlier, Chipotle's business has grown to a place that is even more favorable and financially successful than before the onset of the E. coli outbreaks. Chipotle had a difficult job reengaging its customers who it had lost and reestablishing brand trust, but its dedication to structural change has ultimately helped the Mexican grill giant continue its upward trajectory.

In evaluating Chipotle's strategy, it is important to look into what the company did well and the areas where it could have improved. Chipotle's best move was its focus on transparency with its customer base because 94% of consumers tend to be loyal to brands that are transparent with their customers, and this is a trend that Chipotle tapped into.<sup>28</sup> In its crisis mitigation strategies surrounding operational adjustments and *real* food communications campaigns, Chipotle stressed its truth. Learning about Chipotle's improved food safety protocol only requires a simple Google search to find earned media stories recounting the steps Chipotle has taken to keep its customers safe. Chipotle has set a high standard in terms of transparency when compared to its fast-food rivals, a central reason as to how it bounced back as a dominant force in the fast-food space. However, we suggest that Chipotle could have improved its means of communicating by tailoring its message more specifically to its key publics, better optimizing its earned media opportunities and executing a quicker campaign rollout.

Specifically, the recovery-focused campaigns did not seek to communicate with each of its publics differently. Instead, it grouped the audiences with vastly different focuses into one generalized key public. When communicating with its audiences, Chipotle utilized mostly paid media to interact with its customers and owned media to connect with consumers, journalists and shareholders alike. Generally, earned media opportunities arose when news outlets approached the Chipotle C-suite for statements in response to their breaking news stories on the outbreaks. This model of leveraging earned media demonstrated the company's defense strategy as opposed to taking a proactive approach. Chipotle missed opportunities to maximize earned media to reclaim the narrative and show the company's improved food safety protocol in a more optimistic, innovative light. While Chipotle has been able to overcome its crises, it is still unclear whether this resilience was due to the success of the campaigns or the already established "goodwill". In the aforementioned NPD study, many of Chipotle's customers were willing to

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<sup>27</sup> Balu, Nivedita. "Chipotle's Fresh Food Campaign Drives Profit Beat, Shares Surge." Reuters. Thomson Reuters, February 6, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-chipotle-results/chipotles-fresh-food-campaign-drives-profit-beat-shares-surge-idUSKCN1PV2M4>.

<sup>28</sup> Finney, Teresa. "Chipotle Focuses on 'Radical Ingredient Transparency' in New Ad Campaign." Forbes. Forbes Magazine, September 26, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/teresafinney/2018/09/26/chipotle-focuses-on-radical-ingredient-transparency-in-new-ad-campaign/?sh=5c3773234938>.

turn a blind eye to their mistakes because of its brand loyalty.<sup>29</sup> So, to effectively evaluate Chipotle's crisis mitigation, it's essential to first distinguish success for Chipotle in achieving a business objective as opposed to producing a high-quality public relations plan.

As delineated by the records of the CMG stock value, the Chipotle stock has been on the rise since 2017, which coincides with the timing of its real food campaigns. While these elements are connected, Chipotle could have benefited even more by creating more specific tactics that benefited its shareholders. Chipotle's earnings decreased in the wake of the E.coli outbreaks and did not reach its previous stock highs again until 2019.<sup>30</sup> At the onset, the CMG stock had a net loss of over 50% as shareholders were concerned about what the food safety crisis meant for their investments. The "For Real" campaign succeeded in displaying the authenticity of Chipotle's menu offerings for its consumer base, but shareholders' concerns differ from that of a consumer. It took 18 months for the stock price to come back, demonstrating Chipotle's ineffective messaging toward investors. Chipotle had the customers' "goodwill" but obviously not the investors' backing. While still empowering its customer base, Chipotle should have also worked with investors to help them project their financial future. Investors care about the bottom line: money. Thus, Chipotle would have been even more effective in its stock recovery if it had tailored a message specifically to its investors.

Likewise, Chipotle also should have facilitated a more rapid response to address its customers. The "For Real" campaign was an essential step for the company to take to further its transparency, but it took 18 months to launch this messaging. Chipotle had been transparent through earned and owned media, such as Twitter, but it did not launch any paid media until April 2017. Before this, the only people who could locate information about Chipotle's financial projections in response to the E.coli outbreaks were stakeholders who were actively seeking it. Chipotle made strides in improving its food safety process, but it had nearly no messaging to show for it. The process of communicating the new protocol was evidently flawed. Public relations efforts amid a crisis call for thoroughness coupled with speed. In other words, 18 months is objectively far too long for the initiation of Chipotle's crisis messaging. Many brands might have suffered from its delayed communication, but Chipotle had its "goodwill" to hang on to. Though ultimately effective in retaining customers, finances and a good reputation, Chipotle Mexican Grill's timeline for inadequately reaching each individual key public can be deemed unreasonable and inefficient.

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<sup>29</sup> Whitten, *CNBC*.

<sup>30</sup> "Chipotle Mexican Grill Revenue 2006-2021: CMG." Macrotrends. Accessed October 10, 2021. <https://www.macrotrends.net/stocks/charts/CMG/chipotle-mexican-grill/revenue>.

## Appendices

### Appendix A:



### THE ONLY INGREDIENT THAT'S HARD TO PRONOUNCE AT CHIPOTLE IS "CHIPOTLE."

Chipotle was born of the radical belief that there is a connection between how food is raised and prepared, and how it tastes. These principles result in real flavors that tantalize the tongue, values that singe the taste buds, and real ingredients that are responsibly sourced.

All combined into a creation made just for you, in front of your eyes.

But real isn't just a way of sourcing, cooking, and eating. Real is a way of acting in the world. And when so much of the world feels artificial, it's nice to get back to real.

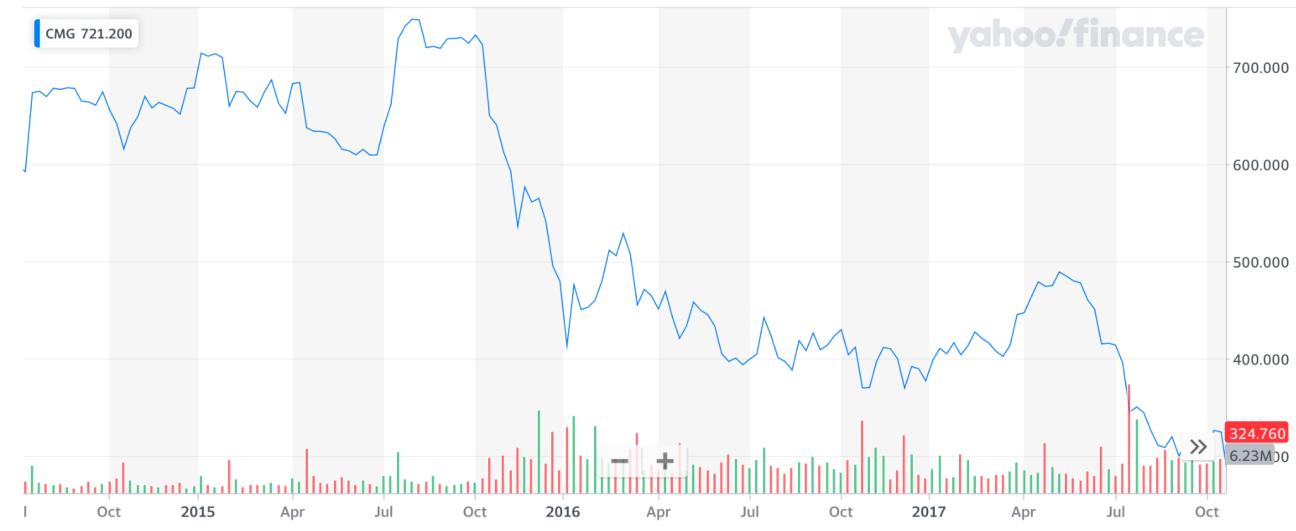
That's why Chipotle has always been committed to preparing real food made with real ingredients. You know, the kind you can recognize and pronounce. In fact, we've listed every single one of them right here. We wish everyone would do the same.

For real food. For real actions. For real change.



(So leave your wondering. It's CHIH-POH-LAY.)

### Appendix B:



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