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After last year's public relations disaster of exploding phone batteries, the much anticipated launch of the Samsung Galaxy S8 last month should have been an opportunity for the tarnished South Korean tech giant to redeem itself.

Yet, reviews of the company's new flagship smartphone have been mixed. While some praised its futuristic design and big screen, customers have complained of red tinted screens, problems with staying connected to Wi-Fi networks, and facial recognition software that can be tricked by a photograph.

The spectacular failure of the Note 7 — banned by airlines as a safety risk and ultimately, humiliatingly withdrawn from sale — and how Samsung has tried unsuccessfully to repair its reputation as a top smartphone manufacturer with the S8 have some lessons to be learnt in marketing and consumer behaviour.

First, it was inevitable the S8 would be subject to intense scrutiny.

Even ardent Samsung fans will look for what are known as "hygiene factors" in the next product — in other words, what would dissatisfy them about it.

Against a legacy of previous major product failure, they become less forgiving for even minor bugs that might, in different circumstances, have been considered part of the territory with boundary-pushing smartphones.

None of the issues so far raised with the S8 come anywhere near the level of the Note 7's exploding battery, which posed a serious danger of causing bodily injury.

The red tinted screen, for example, is a technical glitch that Samsung has said will be solved by an upcoming software update.

NOTE 7 FIASCO MEANS IT MUST DO MORE TO LIVE UP TO PROMISES

S8 glitches put Samsung's credibility in the spotlight

Yet issues like these get undue prominence because of the legacy of the Note 7. Any inconvenience to customers — even a relatively minor one such as having to download a software update — causes grumbling and bad press.

But this also raises another troubling question. If the problems with the S8 are "only minor", why were they not resolved before the phone was released?

Minor issues should be easy to fix — to let them pass and reach market seems sloppy at best on the part of the manufacturer, all the more so given the failings of the Note 7 and Samsung's subsequent promises to do better.

In the wake of last year's troubles, Samsung's PR machine went into overdrive, with a big play on quality assurance and the rigorous testing that goes into the firm's products. Glossy advertisements featured a supposed Samsung testing lab and white-coated technicians tasked with ensuring customers receive only the very best products.

Yet it is debatable whether Samsung has kept to its promises, judging by its new S8 flagship model.

One issue that seems to have particularly irked many consumers and reviewers is the strange placement of the fingerprint sensor at the back of the phone, adjacent to the camera lens.

This results in errant fingers easily smudging the camera lens. This design flaw could prove especially problematic for customers using the



It was inevitable that the flagship S8 model would be subject to intense scrutiny when it was launched, but Samsung has to do more than just listen and improve. PHOTO: REUTERS

increasingly popular Samsung Pay app, which requires fingerprint verification.

Again, such issues are hardly life threatening. Without the backdrop of the Note 7 fiasco, they would almost certainly have achieved far less coverage. But they nonetheless call into question Samsung's pledge to put its customers' first.

The lessons from Samsung are two-fold.

First, it clearly needs to subject its products to far more stringent tests. If necessary, it should have delayed product launches until the kinks were ironed out.

Otherwise, do not promise what you cannot deliver.

Second, it should express humility by thanking customers for their feedback.

When Apple replaced Google Maps from an earlier version of the iPhone with its own map, which had a few glitches, there was an uproar. Apple eventually put back Google Maps.

But Samsung's situation is somewhat different.

Its minor issues come on the back of a big debacle. It has to do more than just listen and improve, based on customer feedback.

Thanking customers will show that their views are valued by the company and go some way in helping a brand that has taken a beating to rebuild an emotional bond with its buyers.

The stakes are high for Samsung, which has lost market share in two consecutive quarters in some markets such as the United States since the Note 7 blew up in its face.

Its new phone was a great opportunity to show that Samsung remains a premium smartphone player that can not only compete with the likes of Apple, LG and Chinese brands such as Huawei, Oppo and Vivo, but also a reliable company that listens to, and understands its customers.

The question with the S8 is whether it has gone far enough.

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