

Brand elements not connecting - 2010 marketing lessons

I am not an avid sports person, let alone a soccer fan, and so I am not going to write about the nitty-gritty of sports. With the 2010 FIFA World Cup in our backyard, I have been fascinated by the shenanigans in the football world and how one can draw lessons on marketing from the beautiful game.

By [Thamsanqa Malinga](#) 1 Jul 2010



The hype around the soccer world cup and, more especially our national team Bafana Bafana and the performance of the latter in the field of play, has got me asking: what happens when the brand fails to connect to other brand elements? Such situation must surely be every marketer's nightmare - a product which does not live up to its promise, as well as link up with its official representative ie the brand ambassador.

A lot of marketing exposure

The South African national soccer team received a lot of marketing exposure during the run-up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

First, calls were made by various high profile people on the nation to rally behind the national soccer brand. At the height of the national support drive we saw towns virtually coming to a standstill and patriotic companies giving workers time off to go out and show their support for Bafana Bafana. Secondly, we had 23 selected players who had the responsibility of acting as official brand ambassadors. Thirdly, the marketers were also hard at work crafting the brand promise.

In all the build-up, the brand promise was that this time around the national team will give a performance above par as they had played a number of games without a loss and that the team would carry the hopes of all South Africa to the next round of the tournament.

With all the brand elements in place, all that was left was for the campaign to work its magic and the marketers would be putting a tick next to the 'very successful campaign' item in their check list. This looked like a fail-proof campaign. After all many a time such campaigns have worked well with all brand elements connecting.

A case in point for such is the skin care and lingerie industries which have always applied what I have come to call the brand elevation triangle: linking the brand and the brand promise with a brand ambassador.

Brand almost compromised

Well, with the South African national soccer team, brand Bafana Bafana, it was a case of brand elevation with brand elements not connecting. After a successful brand promise had been crafted, with the height of it being that [fateful day](#) where some cities were brought to a standstill, the brand ambassadors just failed to connect to the brand promise and as a result the brand itself was almost compromised when people started criticising it (the team).

Now for some marketers, this will go down as a lesson in the importance of having the brand elements talking to each other at all cost. It is for such reasons that I think a crash course of marketing should be given to all brand ambassadors, be it company employees, partners or paid endorsers. Such people should know and even exude the brand promise; they should

also identify with the brand. This will make sure that they don't only sound and look like paid faces but they also believe in brand and what it promises to encourage others to believe in it, too.

What we normally see is people being paid to say what they most probably do not believe in or, in the case of soccer, paid to play for a national brand while they might not believe in the brand's capability of advancing to the next stage of a tournament. At the end of the day you have a situation where the brand dots are not connecting; the brand ambassador is just in it for the money and at the end the brand message is not promoted or sold accordingly.

Endorsement deals

How many endorsement deals did not materialise just because the brand elements did not connect? The Audi scenario with popular DJ comes to mind. Did the jock understand what Audi as a brand stands for, what its brand promise is? I do not think it was "drive way above the speed limit and break the law to experience the vorsprung durch Technik".

I once watched a rugby match and saw the Springboks captain's face covered in bruises and blood. Yes, one might argue that rugby is a full contact sport and that players will come out of it bruised and what not. The only thought that crossed my mind then was that the captain and his players understood and believed in the brand promise and, as brand ambassadors they were prepared to go out there and aggressively promote the brand.

So, in the end, you have all the elements connecting and that is why you have the Springboks brand sitting as one of the top brands in the rugby fraternity. When it comes to Brand Bafana, its brand promise and the brand ambassadors, I personally think that the dots of these elements just failed to connect.

Like I said, I am not an avid sports junkie but the soccer world cup has presented a range of marketing lessons for me. Now let's see what the next stage of the tournament brings.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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