

Five lessons brands can learn from Kony 2012

 By [Maja Rode](#)

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I confess: when I first watched the Kony 2012 clip on YouTube last week, I cried. Creator Jason Russell's web-based film appeals to all of our most basic emotions. The fight of good against evil, the need to protect our children and save those that are unable to save themselves and the belief that we, as ordinary people, can change the world for the better. [video]

Since last week, the film has been viewed more than 75 million times and, according to a [YouTube analysis](#), views have come from all corners of the globe. Except, ironically, from Uganda, the DRC and South Sudan (where Kony himself is now said to operate).

Kony 2012 has undoubtedly become one of the most successful social media-driven marketing campaigns to date, primarily because the public doesn't seem to look at it as a marketing campaign at all. This despite the fact that the Kony 'Action Kit' and various other bits of merchandise, named after what one can only presume are some of the children that have suffered at the hands of Kony (Innocent, Grace and Emmy), are sold out.

The ultimate example

I imagine that the success of Kony 2012 strikes just a little bit of fear in the heart of every marketer out there. Until

something else comes along, I suspect that many a client will hold it up as the ultimate example of a successful social media-driven campaign.

If brands and their causes really do want to compete with Kony 2012, they will have to bear a few important things in mind:

1. Pick a side and get ready for a fight

Kony 2012 works because it is black and white. Figuratively and - according to many critics - literally. If brands hope to emulate the success of the campaign, they'll need to take a strong viewpoint against something - not just for something.

2. Keep it simple

The easier the campaign is to understand, the better. If a five-year old gets it, you've hit the nail on the head. This means eliminate all complexity, nuanced messaging and clever turn of phrase.

3. Speak to the youth

According to the YouTube analysis of the Kony 2012 views, the film is most popular among 13-to-17 year-olds. While many a corporate social responsibility (CSR) campaign may not be targeted at teenagers, they are the ones spreading word of mouth faster than other age groups.

4. Work on visual appeal

Without a compelling visual narrative, there is little to spread. A static poster, tweet or flyer may be noticed, but it won't be passed on.

5. Make it sexy

Despite the dire plight of the invisible children Kony 2012 is in aid of, the campaign manages to retain some form of sex appeal. Russell and his family are not hard on the eye, the soundtrack to the film induces chills, and the merchandising is unique, young and instantly recognisable.

Kony 2012 flies in the face of the way most brands (and NGOs) market their CSR initiatives. It doesn't just seek to inform, but to rally. It doesn't bother with political correctness, but takes an exceptionally strong - often simplistic - view, which is to find and kill Kony. It is serious, but finds a way to be young and hip, too.

It may be misguided, but it's working and I, for one, look forward to the trailblazing brand that'll attempt something similar.

For more:

- Forbes.com: [12 Lessons from KONY 2012 from Social Media Power Users](#)
- Google Search: [Kony 2012](#)
- Twitter Search: [Kony OR Kony 2012](#)

For More list updated at 6.02pm on 19 March 2012.

ABOUT MAJA RODE

Maja Rode is an account director at Corporate Image (www.corporateimage.co.za). With qualifications in marketing, economics and business administration, she's a firm believer in the power of smart communication, of which she thinks there is a serious shortage in SA. Maja believes that PR, driven by the increasing integration with social media platforms, will play an increasingly important role in the boardroom - no more boobs-and-balloons. Email Maja@corporateimage.co.za; follow [@majarode](#).

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