

What has the Bell Pottinger saga taught us?

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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A lot of South Africans would have clapped their hands with joy after hearing that Bell Pottinger had been found guilty by their UK representative body of breaching the PR code of ethics. But, as the biblical saying goes, let him who is without sin cast the first stone.

I believe that there is a massive competitive edge in close examinations of the relationship between money and morality.

Bell Pottinger got nabbed because they were messing with an entire country and not just an industry or a bunch of gullible consumers.

They chose money over morality but they are not alone. Not anywhere in the world nor in South Africa, because there are countless case histories of PR companies and ad agencies choosing to spin untruths on behalf of their clients.

Let's face it, most ad and PR agencies choose not to argue with clients for fear of losing business.

Now, I am not suggesting for a minute that every PR and ad agency in the country should immediately take a vow of commercial chastity, but I am suggesting they should be very careful where to draw the line. And that line depends on who is going to get hurt.

The Bell Pottinger saga has also, quite frankly, confirmed for us that politics is dirty and that this is where the epicentre of money triumphing over morality is to be found.

Coming a close second in the bullshit baffles brains stakes is the business sector. There are not many companies in the world that can truly put their hands on their hearts and claim to standing on a moral high ground.

The very nature of business involves often cut-throat competition and where there is cut-throat competition there will always be conniving, scheming and sailing very close to the wind.

Interestingly, the situation has become so bad in both politics and business that some companies, at least, have started examining their corporate consciousness not necessarily out of guilt but because they believe there might well be a lot to be gained from a marketing point of view.

This is nothing new because it ties in with a little-used PR strategy that was discovered a decade ago and that is the power of apology.

I have found increasingly, that when I conduct marketing audits for my clients some of them ask me to have a really close look at opportunities that may present themselves by ensuring that money does not blindly dominate morality.

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ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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