

Keeping brand love alive

By [James Wilson](#)

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Anyone in a long-term relationship knows it can be challenging at times. It's not always wine, roses and long walks on the beach. So how do you keep the love alive?



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This Valentine's month, [WE South Africa](#) hosted a romantic roundtable entitled "Falling in love with your brand again". We wanted to talk about a real love affair – the one your consumers should be having with your brand. And we brought in the experts for some relationship counselling.

Communication in times of crisis

Kirby Gordon, VP of Sales and Marketing at FlySafair, knows how difficult it can be to continue to woo your audience after something goes wrong. "All companies run the risk of having their CEO caught with their pants down," he said. "But in the aviation space there is the added element of real crises happening on an operational level." That's exactly what happened in late January when FlySafair found itself in the news after two unrelated loss of cabin pressure incidents took place in a single week on the same aircraft.

Gordon explained that since FlySafair's launch in October 2014, the brand's aim has been to develop a meaningful relationship with consumers. Through strategic communication, they have been working to educate would-be flyers about true low-cost flying, while positioning themselves as experts in the aviation field. Holding company, Safair's 50 years of operation helped to cement this position.

So the relationship was blossoming until it literally started feeling the pressure – or lack thereof. That's when the value of PR and crisis communications came into play. After ensuring that both flights made it safely to the ground and all safety procedures had been followed to the "T", it was all about managing the narrative for Gordon and the team.

"Some say that managing the narrative is dead, as we move more into the space of public leadership," said Gordon. "However, when it comes to crisis communications, going back to basics and managing the narrative is essential."

By owning the story, remaining the central source of news and being strategic in terms of their media engagement, as well as communicating this approach internally, FlySafair managed to turn a potential break-up around. The initial negative comments and coverage were far outweighed by positivity and acknowledgement that the airline had done everything by the book.



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FlySafair also proved it could keep the brand love alive with a spike in sales following January's incidents, proving that good communication is always important in a relationship.

Innovating to keep things fresh

Equally important is keeping things fresh and not getting stuck in a rut. Talk Radio 702's tech guru, Aki Anastasiou, was on hand to share the latest digital innovations brands should be thinking about to continue wooing consumers. "In the next 20 years humanity will change more than it has in the past 300," said Anastasiou. "We're living in a digital world and evolving using technology."

With the number of smartphone users in Africa predicted to reach 600 million by 2020, the Syrian refugees counting their smartphones as their most important possession, and the world's cheapest smartphone launching in India for just R58, it's clear that this is the sweet spot for brands to develop a love affair with consumers.

That said, Anastasiou added that innovation in smartphones has reached a plateau. The next wave of innovation is coming in the form of self-driving and electric cars. With only seven of the existing car manufacturers predicted to survive over the next few decades, brands wanting to continue feeling the consumer love need to innovate. And that goes for brands across the board, as homes become more connected, health devices allow us to check our health as often as we check our emails and virtual reality becomes, well, a reality.

"40% of today's Fortune 500 companies will be gone in the next 10 years," said Anastasiou. Our take-out: to sustain a long-term relationship, think customisation and brand experience... and don't forget communication is key.

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