

ANC brand's intellectual property management

By  Gillian Rightford

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Charting the trials and tribulations of the ANC over the course of 2008 will no doubt make for a very interesting case study. Not in politics, but in brand management and on the "un-intellectual" approach to its intellectual property.



The fundamental flaw in its approach appears to be that people (or in government parlance, "citizens") will believe everything they are told about a brand. They will listen attentively to the messages emanating from official sources, and they will obey. They will then carry these beliefs to their dying day, beliefs that have been crafted by the "owners" of the brand and received loud and clear by the recipients.

Days are over

Enter that wonderful old adage about "products are made in the factory, but brands are created in the mind". The days of marketers, no matter of what, having a one-sided conversation with the consumer, are, of course, way over.

People, especially as they are exposed to more freedom of opinions, simply don't always believe and do what they are told about brands. They are free to craft their own perception of the brand in any which way they like, based on any and all of the input they receive. Jeremy Bullmore, former chairman of JWT, says that consumers create brands as "birds build nests. From the scraps and straws they chance upon".

The second major flaw in its brand management strategy appears to be the lack of understanding of the "Say - Do - Confirm" model of integrated brand messaging. Simply, what I **say**, is planned and I, as brand owner, exert a large degree of control over this. What I **do** should be planned and controlled, and should of course underscore the "say" part of the brand so that the message, the perceptions, the feelings and overall, the level of trust, is **confirmed**.

What the consumer believes

If what Brand X (or A, N and C), Says and Does are not aligned, the message is not Confirmed, and the brand is not trusted. And in the consumer's mind, the brand moves away from what it says it is, to what the consumer believes it is. And no amount of saying is going to change that!

Douglas Smith, a renowned management and marketing author wrote this about the Republican party in the USA, "What happens to companies can also happen to political parties -- indeed, any organisation in this new world of ours. At some point, if the brand delivery and brand experience radically contradict the brand promise, then the customers (in this case, voters), the investors (in this case, contributors) and even the employees (in this case those who work and volunteer for the Republican Party) will actually look at the delivery and the experience to define the brand of the Party and not to the promises themselves".

So when Julius Malema says what he says, when Jacob Zuma says what he says, and when the ANC often doesn't say what it should, and does what it likes, you have a massive disconnect between Brand Say and Brand Do.

The ANC as a KFC franchise

Picture the ANC as a KFC franchise, and imagine the Colonel and his team allowing the KFC Youth MD to be at odds with the ethos, the image, and the values of the Motherbrand? Of course he would be fired, instantly. KFC Youth would go on a massive PR campaign to rebuild brand bridges, and the Motherbrand could just live to see another day, untarnished.

Because of course, if the Youth League uses the ANC brand in its name, it is a brand extension. If it sings a discordant song - it may be a political game, but truth is the real brand owners, the consumers, are readjusting their views of what the ANC stands for as a result. Not in a nice way, either.

Of course, brands can evolve. The ANC brand probably has evolved. But its messaging hasn't; just its behaviour has. Creating confusion. There is no room for confusion in the war-room of brand positioning.

Makes a great news story

So now, Malema has supposedly been reigned in after months of unintellectual damage to intellectual property. And the media has been admonished for being nasty. Flaw no. 3: you can't control the "scraps and straws" from which consumers will build their brand. But you can control your brand behaviour, and thus their brand experience. And if you shout loud about brand promises, and your brand behaviour is at odds with those, it makes a great news story...

Too little, too late, from a brand health point of view. Now the ANC is in court fighting with COPE over intellectual property. Protection of intellectual property is of course paramount: but in this instance it might be better served in managing the intellectual property it has, and the way its consumers interpret that through their own intellectual filters, consciously and sub-consciously. It's not just about protection of a name, a symbol, the colours you choose. It's about protecting what it means.

Much has been written about the Barack Obama campaign. All our political parties can learn from it. Pick a clear positioning for your brand that has relevance and resonance with your audience. Then, consistently build and reinforce your brand promise, not just with words, but also with behaviour, at every level of your organisation, every day. Spend more time walking the talk instead of in court!

ABOUT GILLIAN RIGHTFORD

Gillian Rightford's CV is a mix of marketing, advertising, and management. A former group MD of Lowe Bull, she started Adtherapy (www.adtherapy.co.za), a company that aims to improve the quality of advertising out there through better skills and better client/agency relationships. Contact Gillian on tel +27 (0)21 761 2812 or email gillian@adtherapy.co.za, read her blog at <http://adtherapy.blogspot.com> and follow her on Twitter at @grightford.

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