

First National Blunder

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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I have to say that I really liked the FNB campaign that the ANC hated so much.

I liked it because it is always refreshing to see a commercial corporation having the balls to stand up and speak out against what it sees as social injustice.

Particularly given the penchant of business in South Africa to just quietly curry favour with whatever party is in power. They almost all did it during apartheid and they pretty much all do it now. Except for FNB, Nedbank and a few others.

Good stuff

As an ordinary South African I like to see people, companies and organisations speak their minds. To say it like it is.

But, as a marketer I think that what FNB tried to do was completely insane.

The first clue to this insanity was a statement from FNB that they didn't intend the campaign to be political. Well, just how naive can you be?

One of the most basic fundamentals of marketing is that it is not about what you have said but how consumers perceived what you have said.

Lessons from history

I would have thought that FNB would learn from its stupidity in 2007 when it got snared up in a controversy over statements it made about crime. I would have thought that given the excellent track record in marketing FNB has demonstrated these past few years that they would have carefully considered what they were doing before leaping into the cauldron with such obvious abandon.

If any of their marketing and advertising people in particular had taken the trouble to read the newspapers, listen to the radio or watch TV news these past few years, they would not have missed the fact that the ANC is not only super-sensitive to any political statements that could even vaguely be regarded as negative, but also that the ANC is paranoid and prone to knee-jerk reactions. Usually hysterical.

The fact that FNB pulled the whole campaign after just a few days is testament to the fact that they simply did not think it

through. That not a single thought was given to unintended consequences.

Little worlds

FNB is not alone - a far too large a section of the advertising community is completely out of touch with current affairs and living in their own little world of mostly make believe consumer behaviour

There are those who argue, of course, that FNB has got a lot of public sympathy and encouragement for their brand, but this is nonsense.

One has to bear in mind that the ANC has more than 60% of the popular vote in this country and therefore it can be logically deduced that if the ANC is irritated by what FNB has done then a massive chunk of the voting population of this country will also be annoyed. It is a mistake in marketing to upset even a small section of your target market, let alone what, in this case, could be the majority of it.

Fundamentals

There is another very basic fundamental of marketing. Do not, under any circumstances venture into the realms of religion or politics when it comes to advertising. Its what would-be advertising execs are taught early on - probably when they are still sperm.

According to statistics that I trot out at the drop of a hat, 20% of all advertising in this country not only doesn't work but impacts negatively on the brand it is supposed to be promoting.

I have to say that for a company that has in recent years taken the marketing of banking services to entirely new level, it is beyond me how they managed to get this one so incredibly wrong.

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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