

How to lose your customers in three easy steps

By [Lindsay Grubb](#)

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It's much easier to lose a customer than it is to make them a loyal fan, so why are companies such as Shoe City shooting themselves in the proverbial foot? Here's how it - and *You* magazine - lost my business in three easy steps. [[update: Shoe City apology](#)]



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Step 1: It agreed with its advertising agency that this ad was a good idea and was sure to bring customers in store

I can picture it now. The creative sitting there, rocking back and forth on his high back chair, brainstorming Shoe City's next ad.

"Hmmm, ok, free association time. Boots... puss in boots... cats... my neighbour's cat is really getting on my last nerve OK! I got it - We'll sell shoes by saying you should reward yourself for running over cats. That's the idea that is going to win me multiple awards."

Somehow, this idea makes it past brainstorm stage and the creative director allows it to be pitched to the client.

Then I'm picturing the agency pitching Shoe City this ad idea and I'm wondering how it wasn't chased out of the room in disgust by the Shoe City marketing manager, because who on earth would agree to align their product with behaviour - accidental or otherwise - that leads to animals meeting a tragic end?

Step 2: It forgot who it was talking to

So, somehow this ad makes it through all of the sensible checks and balances on its journey to its magazine appearance.

Or did it? Surely somebody gave some thought to their target audience. They are advertising women's winter boots - so it would be safe to assume they're targeting women.

If they had, they should probably have thought about the fact that, on the whole, women are quite emotional, nurturing creatures themselves. The odds are high that, at some stage in their lives, these women have had a pet or two, and the odds are quite high that those pets were probably cats. They loved these animals, sought comfort from them, nurtured them, and treasured them.

Again, the odds are high that, at some stage, many of their female target audience have lost their beloved pets in horrible ways. In the course of my lifetime, for example, I have had four cats and two dogs. Two of the cats were run over, one was definitely by a neighbour. I found them and it wasn't pretty. I was traumatised, added to which I'm the kind of person who gets upset when I see cats run over when I'm out and about, and they're not even mine.

So, just maybe, instead of thinking this ad is clever and witty, the women you are trying to get into your stores would be highly offended by it. Maybe, this ad would dredge up horrible memories and now, every time they think of your brand, they associate it with this terrible ad and the way it makes them feel.

Step 3: It went ahead and did it anyway

Against all logic and good judgement, Shoe City paid good money to showcase this full page ad in *You* magazine. (I don't know how many other magazines this went into, and this doesn't deserve my valuable time to investigate it further.) It was short-sighted enough to think this ad wouldn't hurt and offend people.

You magazine is also an accessories after the fact. It accepted money to include this offensive ad in its 26 May 2011 edition, when it should have said, "We don't want something like this in our family magazine as it will offend our readers."

Here's a rule of thumb: When we as human beings, whether by accident or on purpose, take a life - human or animal - we **do not reward ourselves** with a pair of boots.

So Shoe City and *You* magazine, whatever happens, there's always another store around the corner where I can buy my shoes and another magazine or website where I can get my dose of celebrity gossip.

For more:

- Icommunications.net: [Can your company survive the fallout of bad publicity?](#)
- Bizcommunity: [Shoe City ad: Lowe Bull "regrets any distress caused", apologises](#)
- Bizcommunity: [Shoe City ad: You magazine editor responds](#)
- Bizcommunity: [Shoe City apologises for "tasteless" magazine ad by Lowe Bull](#)
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For More links updated at 3.54pm on 8 June 2011.

For More links updated at 10.42pm on 9 June 2011.

For More list updated at 3.55pm on 21 June 2011.

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I am a Johannesburg-based freelance writer and editor with a talent for crafting well-researched, strategically aligned, and professionally written communications and searching out and telling interesting brand stories that create interest in and loyalty to brands. I have worked with local and international clients for the past 20 years.

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