

Communication lessons from The Steve & Nancy Saga: A Sorbet Story

 By [Tiffany Markman](#)

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Let me first admit two things: 1. I'm a groomer. Big time. I polish. I wax. I whiten and straighten and tweak. 2. I do a fair chunk of this at Sorbet salons, making me what they call a 'guest'...

And yet, when I saw the troublesome Sorbet billboard, I shook my head in irritation.



The much-criticised Sorbet billboard featuring Steve and Nancy.

Not because I was offended by the billboard - I wasn't. I was irritated because I foresaw a world of viral drama and because, as a writer, I found the strategy weak and the messaging (that is, the copy itself), poorly executed.

So here are some communication lessons from The Steve & Nancy Saga:

1. Don't jump onto the campaign bandwagon (in this case, Steve) of another brand (in this case, FNB) just to be topical. Other companies' campaigns have their own associations, and these don't always complement yours.
2. If you *do* decide to jump onto another's bandwagon, research the hell out of it first, to ensure that it hasn't already offended its own audience (in this case, a whole lot of Steves are peeved about the verb 'un-Steve'; a phenomenon that Sorbet has now accidentally extended to people called Nancy).
3. Ensure that your unspoken messaging (in this case, 'Go on - spoil yourself') is supported by the copy, or your audience

will miss your good intentions.

4. Don't deviate from your style and tone. In this case, the phrase 'unpolished, unwaxed and unloved' runs counter to the Sorbet ethos. It also creates the impression that Sorbet hopes to convert non-groomers into groomers with guilt. It doesn't. I believe Sorbet when it says "we believe in regular manicures and pedicures, waxes, facials and massages - not only because it looks good, but because it promotes the "feel-good" factor we're all after." It does. And because Sorbet is so affordable, it is possible to groom more regularly. Which should have been the campaign's key message all along, perhaps?

5. If the campaign goes to hell, culminating in a social media sh*t-storm, act quickly to apologise and explain. Stay in theme, though. Don't default to boring in your crisis communications, just to show that you're sorry.

6. When you apologise, don't use the dangerous word 'if', as in 'if we offended'. Just say sorry. Unconditionally and authentically.



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@SorbetGroup Guys, a little tip - when apologising, don't use the word 'if'.



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A screen grab of my advice regarding how to phrase apologies.

7. Use the opportunity to make good. Make sure your audience knows about your good-making. And then stop going on about the issue and the good-making. There is such a thing as defending too much. Let people move on.

8. Don't be afraid to take bold steps in future. Just quiz yourself carefully before you do, to make sure it's the right bold step.

Good luck. And go have a pedicure. It'll make you feel wonderful. I promise.

ABOUT TIFFANY MARKMAN

I spend 10 hours a day writing - and teaching others to write. I was South Africa's Freelance Copywriter of the Year in 2020 and one of the world's 'Top 50 Female Content Marketers' in 2021.

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