

So where did FNB mess up?

 By [Walter Pike](#)

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Quite honestly I am not going to go down the road of criticising FNB for getting involved in either politics or religion with its "You Can Help" campaign. Although on that subject I have to point out that as a global megatrend there is a strong argument that says that corporates need to involve themselves with social issues. Ask Starbucks what it feels to be on the receiving end of not doing so.

But FNB did make a rookie mistake when marketing in the social era.

They simply placed production values ahead of authenticity, and in this era production values are valued less and less. So let's track the process I understand it. FNB went out to gather insights from South African youth as to how they see our society and what can be done to improve it.

The agency reviewed the responses and gathered the main streams together and summarised them in a script.

And then FNB...

The agency then went Fake Real - they created something that pretended to be real but was in fact fake. In contrast to Real Fakes like Disneyland an authentic fake so to speak. So although the fake was premised on reality it was clearly and without any question a fake.

The live broadcast was staged, the speech was scripted, the schoolgirl rehearsed and paid and an elaborate and probably extremely expensive live broadcast production created, so that was real although everything that was there was fake.

And everyone picked that up immediately, so FNB took flak for being things that are completely normal in commercial production, all done in the name of creating a real experience. Commercial are scripted, artistes are paid and expensive high quality equipment is used to ensure quality.

The respondents in the research interviews were posted on the blog as releases were received to prove that the commercial itself was based on reality.

But...

How much better would that commercial have been if it had just used hand-held iPhone quality video taken at the actual interviews and cut as a background to the scripted scrolling titles. They could still have cut out whatever it was that these

children said that was so offensive and just included the real stuff.

The ad industry, whether driven by commercial considerations or just being stuck in the legacy advertising paradigm, thinks that production values are important, they do so because they live in the interruption marketing era, where its important to make sure you produce commercials that will effectively engage people doing other stuff, like watching a movie or football or whatever.

In the social era you have to create social objects or ideas around which people will coordinate, make them remarkable and shareable and people will share them and remark about them.

There is a little more to it than that, because it's important that you facilitate the discourse effectively that the community has been sparked to engage in, but that's another discussion.

But had it come across as 'real'...

The detractors have attacked FNB because this was 'an attack on the ANC' and was clearly fake so is assumed to be fake and unauthentic no matter how real the underlying research. If it had come across as real there may still have been a reaction but the conversation would have stayed on the issue and not have been hijacked as it was.

It would have been so easy to make this a real, *real*/ campaign and allowed a discussion of hope and change to sweep through the community. Instead FNB has been beaten into submission in the eyes of the public.

Other than failing in facilitating the social media conversation this was the cornerstone of the "failure" of the campaign, create stuff that's really fake or really real but stay away from the fake real.

ABOUT WALTER PIKE

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