

Service: two wrong feet and ugly shoes

 By Dylan Balkind

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What a swirl of service-siren crazy we've been treated to. Not the mad kind, the good kind - and finally! Because service is bollocks in South Africa and peeps be getting tired of having to lick their own. Cell C got called out on a massive billboard, another was hitched to the back of a car telling on FNB, there was the tweet-storm around a frog found in a Woolies salad, our home-grown trends analyst set out to anti-trend Fly SAA via his Instagram feed for being delayed, and yours truly let MTN know that the MacBook is mightier than the sword^[1].

Each launched and lauded publicly. Each leveraged countless conversations both on and offline, and ultimately, each demonstrated social media's truest perspective: to trend transparency.



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In 2000, Susannah Grant wrote the movie script about one woman who '...brought a small town to its feet and a huge corporation to its knees.' It wasn't Hollywood's glazing that made it great. It was that it actually happened. That a single mother, unemployed and dealing with dozens of other pressures - as we all do in our own way, everyday - applied herself and steered her fight in the direction of her moral compass: truth-north^[2].

More than the smile-for-miles Julia Roberts to give it its traction is our love for an underdog-David who grinds Goliath to his knees. A different landscape for her though: Erin Brockovich never had the hopes of the hashtag, a blog or 1,243 friends on Facebook to help her holler that Hexavalent Chromium 6 was making people sick. Now however, whether you start or end up on social media, if truth-north is your true motivation, chances are your story will spread like wildfire too.

Let's talk about me

It's good to be on MTN, neh? Not neh. My 'not neh' was a soap opera supreme - just far more painful and without the excessive sex - and went on longer than Katherine Kelly Lang has been Brooke on The Bold and the Beautiful. Hint: it's a really long time. She first booked Brooke in 1987. I tried. I sighed. I tried some more - and then I published [MTN: Smugly shirking service](#) on my blog.

Moments of truth

Your average nineties salesman would no-doubt reckon a moment of truth to be when browsing turns to buying and a sale is made. Cut-to-now and the sale is just one part of it. The real moments of truth are in how your customer experiences

your brand everyday - or on any one particular day - across all your touchpoints.

How we rate a brand is based on the unique experiences we enjoy or suffer, from our decision to buy, the experience around the actual sale, and then through to how that purchase leaves us feeling. In reality, these 'moments' comprise minutes, days, weeks, months and often years, and because we talk about them (everywhere!) is where social media becomes the call for accountability.

Google calls this a Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT) - the distance your finger travels to click your mouse, whether it's to read others' good/bad experiences - or report your own. So the internet is not only where we track trends, but now it *is* a trend, and our (oft compulsive) behaviour to tell, tell, tell, has made peer endorsement the campaign to end all campaigns.

This 'after sales service' is most certainly where South Africans get the sads, settling in silence with *spoiler alert* mindless TV. But strength comes from seeing strength succeed, so thankfully, there are those with a) lots of money to bankroll a billboard, b) lots of petrol to drive one around, or c) a liking for the online.

Feedback: You teach people how to treat you

How often do you see an incorrect purchase or duplicate on your bank statement? Or you bear the brunt of bitchy Betty at Books and Beyond, or have ~~tried to get a query resolved~~ been to the City Council? You leave, vein in forehead throbbing and swear to right the wrongs of your person with terrifying triumph!

And then you get home and the Kardashians are on, plus you have that 3 Talk episode on PVR where Noeleen talked "Turning your mattress - and why you should!" Terrific, right? No. Not terrific, because rather than truth, these are just moments of tedium, and effectively turn you into the very customer service killjoy that allows bad service to go on, evergreen.

Our ever-trailblazing Kim had her own moment of truth recently. Colonel Saunders himself rose from his resting place at the news that one of his heavy haulage trucks responsible for delivering oil to his *hoender* outlets across North America was missing. Turns out it had gone West and was needed to lather her most gallant and relevant attempt to break the internet.



All hail greasy Kim! Err... Kardashian that is, not Jong Un (slight differences depicted here):



This is horrible Kim who was recently seen out and about, battling with a limp.



This is limp Kim, who was recently seen looking horrible with her stuff out (and about).

Brand or bland - and it pains me to say this: her game guarantees an audience. Why? Because her "trend" is the talk that keeps a global gathering of tuned-in, tired-of-life people talking... which keeps her trending... which keeps them talking...

and, and, and. Now picture it: She's just left FNB after being turned down on her much-needed loan application, and is left feeling that their "how can we help you?" ethos is not particularly helpful at all... Carnage. A tweet and her moping mugshot on Instagram - both underpinned by one synergistic hashtag - and there'd be furore across Fourways for sure!

But... *sigh* ... there's a little capacity-to-Kim in all of us. To court commotion by calling-out the languid who let us down; the men and women who have been awarded jobs as the face(s) of the very brands who chum chunks of our salaries with glee.

Suffering Saffas

South Africans are polite. We're enduring. We're tolerant. We'll keep wheel-turning to a fault. Hey - just a glimpse at what goes on in parliament these days shows just how longsuffering we are.

But as far as shoddy service goes - it's lame. And the only loser is an obvious one. If rightful insistence on getting what we pay for was the norm, Mr George Prokas wouldn't have had to prove that the power really was in his hands with a dramatic billboard - costing Cell C reputational damage, PR embarrassment and R160,000 in legal fees. Fail.

Fail forward

When the forum for feedback is in place, learnings enable brands to fail forward, but the dramatics exemplified here are proof that the forum scarcely exists. I shouldn't have had to invent Myocene to show how MTN treats its customers. But hey, it got the attention of the CEO's office, who then assigned someone with the authority to see to it that I was treated to a resolution (albeit after a month of mindlessness disguised as service). So yes, they did a great stitch-up and hopefully failed forward. But why go there at all? The cost of reparations, employee reviews and the online revisiting (such as this one) overshadows the opportunity to impress with a straightforward fix at the onset. This is not rocket science.

Brands need to sit up and face the front - and quickly. How each service person plays their part in every customer's journey offers little room for sloppy errors. And why should it? We all have a voice now. We are all Erins, ready to bring our friends and fans to their feet and corporations to their knees.

Pretty prophetic then that Cell C's vision and mission [statement](#) closes with: *"This is just the beginning"*. Indeed. It is. And the plan of action for the brand that bails on you can no longer be to put you on hold... and put you on hold... and put you on hold...

So... What's the difference between a moment of tedious and a moment of truth that you make work for you?

They're called balls, Ed.

[1] *I was first - 'cause I'm cool like that.*

[2] *This is not a real term. I just made it up now. Feel free to use it. Take it to the streets! Make it trend!*

ABOUT DYLAN BALKIND

Even the person who can sell ice to Eskimos needs have a way of letting the world know . Words. They're wonderful warriors with the potential for worry. Use a writer who takes his passion seriously. Here's more about me and mine: <http://goo.gl/68Rsse> | Twitter [@DylanBalkind](#)

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