

The amazing Obz waitress tip campaign

By Sarah Britten

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Every now and then, I come across a campaign that makes me sit up and take notice. A campaign that prompts me to say "wow" and then ask: why did it work? And, yes, wonder how we could replicate that kind of success for our clients.

“ TOTAL RAISED: R44 777.70

Thank you to all who stood up against the bigotry and hatred. pic.twitter.com/9fDpCz1xlm— The Renegade Report (@Renegade_Report) [May 1, 2016](#) ”

The campaign that caught my attention over the past couple of days was one of [two fundraising drives](#) launched in response to #RhodesMustFall activist Ntokozo Qwabe's now notorious Facebook post, where he celebrated the humiliation of a waitress at the Obz Café. Instead of leaving Ashleigh Schultz a tip, Qwabe and his fellow activist Wandile Dlamini wrote: "We will give tip when you return the land." Later Sihle Ngobese (@SihleDLK) visited Obz Café to give R50 to the waitress, inspiring Roman Cabanac, host of [The Renegade Report](#) on CliffCentral, to do something similar using Twitter.

Launched on the night of Friday, 29 April, the campaign aimed to raise a couple of thousand rand at most. By the time it ended on the evening of Sunday, the campaign had raised R44,777.70 from an estimated 121 individual donors. The largest single donation was R5,000; the smallest R20. Demand was so great from overseas supporters that Cabanac set up a Paypal account for those who could not make direct deposits. Regardless of whether you were personally in favour of the campaign – which was widely criticised by [Woke Twitter](#) – that's astounding ROI. The kind of ROI that would put a lot of award winning campaigns to shame.



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Here's what's interesting (and, to be honest, a little frustrating too). This campaign had no logo. No strategy. No hashtag. It wasn't linked to a crowdfunding platform and it wasn't easy to participate. It ran over a long weekend, which is normally a terrible time to expect results from social media. In short, it lacked many of the ingredients for success. Yet the results it achieved were astonishing. Why?

There are probably many complex and interlinked reasons for the R44,777.70. These might be some of them:

1. It was highly differentiated.

There are thousands upon thousands of good causes out there, most of them far more deserving than this one. Finding desperate need is easy: you just need to drive through your nearest intersection. Raising funds for a tip for a waitress? That's not helping the hungry or the homeless, but it's certainly *different*. And because the players in the drama did not fit comfortably into the usual boxes we reserve for race and class – an Oxford student who happens to be black versus a white working class waitress whose mother has cancer – this made it stand out in a sea of injustice and outrage.

2. It was emotionally resonant.

Was this campaign about rejecting racism, as The Renegade Report argued? Was it about giving a middle finger to abusive restaurant patrons, as implied by comments by donors who had themselves been waiters? Or was it about whites returning to the laager and claiming back power in the wake of the successes of the #RhodesMustFall movement, as maintained by the campaign's critics? Probably a mix of all of these. The incident was starkly symbolic of the tensions circulating in South Africa right now, and emotionally involving enough to prompt more than a hundred individuals to go to the trouble of listing Cabanac's bank account as a beneficiary.

3. It was simple.

Make sure the Obz Café waitress gets her tip. The message was simple and easy to understand. Simple messages that offer easy solutions to everything that is wrong with the world are far more effective than complex messages with no clear answer.

4. It got out quickly.

There was no brainstorming. Nobody waited for artwork or a messaging strategy. The campaign simply launched and rode the emotional wave that followed Qwabe's Facebook post. This was the epitome of agility, and it paid off.

5. It offered an outlet for anxieties otherwise kept bottled up.

I've discussed this campaign with some smart people. Some of them have suggested that its success can be linked to the fact that it offered an outlet for something that is now considered *verboden* in the post-Penny Sparrow era: being seen to side with a white South African in a racially charged incident. Feeling threatened by #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall? Scared to express an opinion in case Woke Twitter targets you? Donate a tip to the Obz waitress and feel better!

6. Word got out to the right people.

Cabanac told me that Barry Bateman was the key influencer here; his large following was a factor in getting the word out. The following of Cabanac, his co-presenter Jonathan Witt and the Renegade Report itself would have been too small to get the necessary traction on its own. Because Qwabe is a controversial figure in the UK, the Facebook post and the campaign also generated [international coverage](#).

7. The haters helped. A lot.

The central irony of this incident is that there would have been no campaigns and no huge tip if Qwabe himself hadn't boasted about the humiliation of an anonymous white waitress on Facebook. It was Qwabe's own words that provided the emotional impetus that powered the call to action. Schultz didn't need to make anyone feel sorry for her; Qwabe did that all on his own. Later, criticism of the campaign raised even more awareness by generating conversation around it. Donating to it would not just have been a way to help Schultz; it would have been a way for donors to feel that they were getting even with a vocal group of social media activists they happen to dislike. (The debate can probably be summed up by the insults that were used: essentially, you had "right wing assholes" squaring up to "SJWs".*) See point 5.

8. Finally, it was authentic.

No logo, no hashtag, no strategy. It's entirely possible that this is exactly *why* this campaign worked so well. It's also – sadly – why a campaign like this is almost impossible to replicate by an agency for a client.

In short, an emotionally resonant incident that amplified anxieties circulating in society right now, coupled with a way for a niche market to safely express their opinion on a divisive issue, matched with a way to spread the message, added up to a recipe for highly differentiated and remarkably successful campaign.

Can it be replicated for other fundraising efforts for other, more deserving causes? Perhaps. But the past few days have been a reminder of how unpredictable social media is – and that the ingredients we as marketers imagine are essential aren't always necessary. It's a humbling lesson, but a good one.

*SJW, for those of you who don't know, stands for "social justice warrior", a pejorative term for a social media activist.

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