

TOUGH LESSONS FROM SA CORPORATE BLUNDERS ON TWITTER - A FEW TIPS ON REDUCING THE DAMAGE

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Sorry.

OUTsurance, MiWay and more recently 702 Radio have all had social media mishaps. [OUTsurance](#) and [702 Radio](#) because of decisions taken by their own teams and [MiWay](#), somewhat unfairly as a result of a “fake” email that it attributes to a disgruntled customer.



Social media can be a minefield if not used wisely, particularly in situations and on topics that may seem trivial and light-hearted to some, but which may be hugely sensitive to others. This is particularly so in countries and communities with painful and troubled histories.

Corporates, both local and international, regularly get it wrong. [Pepsi got it totally wrong](#) when it recently released a campaign which mirrored the recent Black Lives Matter protests in the United States.



Home Depot, an American DIY, chain [showed poor judgment](#) in a campaign with racial undertones, involving a person dressed in a gorilla costume.

The reality is that most social media and advertising campaigns that go horribly wrong do not intend to be racist or to offend a particular group’s sensitivities. These blunders typically occur because of a failure to adequately vet campaigns for controversy.

Thomas Hobbs makes an interesting observation in his article titled *Pepsi’s ad failure shows the importance of diversity and market research*. He says: “A poll of 754 marketing professionals conducted by Marketing Week in partnership with One Poll’s consumer survey reveals nearly half (42%) of marketers believe the brands they work for are failing to reflect a contemporary, racially-diverse, society in their marketing and advertising.” And this is an American survey.

So, what can South African corporates learn, from the blunders of both their international and local

peers? How can they avoid making similar mistakes and when they are made, how do they remedy them as quickly and honestly as possible? The best summary of what to do comes from what some might say is one of the most uncontroversial sources: the New Zealand Government. They have the following advice in their publication *Social Media in Government - How to Handle a Mishap* -

- Act quickly;
- Apologise genuinely;
- Show the steps you will take to ensure it will not happen again;
- Make your remedial action public;
- See it from the “users” point of view;
- Do not retaliate to abuse or trolling;
- It is a judgement call if you choose to delete a post, however never delete comments just because they are negative;
- Delete comments only if the language is offensive or abusive; and
- After the event, ensure that an assessment is done of what went wrong and how it can be prevented in future.

Of course, the old saying that prevention is better than cure, is probably the most useful. Train social media staff on the dangers of social media, alert them to the bad experiences of other corporates and have a diverse social media or marketing team. If there is any doubt or “gut feel” about a tweet or a post, consult a little more widely than usual. This is because Holt makes a (perhaps controversial) point when he says that *“even if an in-house agency is filled with people of colour then they will still likely become so wedded to the brand, and see things through the lens of the brand, that they fail to spot tone or how the outside world perceives their brand.”*

Mistakes are still bound to happen, but hopefully if some of the lessons above are applied, such mistakes will be fewer and farther between.

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