

Exclusive: How to successfully market your brand with significant calendar days

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As brands work to cement loyalty with consumers and customers, they're increasingly turning to days of significance as moments to make their mark



Image supplied. Lindsay Manuel, senior strategist at MC Saatchi Abel discusses how brands can successfully market on days of significance

As brands work to cement loyalty with consumers and customers, they're increasingly turning to days of significance as moments to make their mark.

At first glance, it seems like a no-brainer for marketers to tie their campaigns to significant calendar days like Human Rights, Youth, Valentine's day, and even Christmas and Easter.

They pack an emotional and cultural punch, providing an opportunity for brands to connect with audiences and deliver messages that really hit home.

In South Africa, where our history takes centre-stage on Heritage and Nelson Mandela days, brands have a real shot at creating purpose-driven messaging to spark conversations and prove their relevance. It's also a chance to show some social responsibility and cultural savvy.



Source: © DFashion [DFashion](#)

Campaigns that play on shared experiences

Take Nando's, for example – they're all about turning Heritage Day (aka National Braai Day) into a memorable moment with campaigns that play on shared experiences.

The brand's collab in 2023 with Puma to reimagine an iconic 80s sneaker to fire up Heritage Day is a good case in point. Genius move.

But marketing on special days also comes with its own set of challenges. Brands risk appearing opportunistic or insincere if they're just in it for a quick win without a genuine commitment.

South Africans are innately passionate people especially when it comes to taking pride in our history, heritage and

cultures.



Source: © Times Live [Times Live](#)

A slippery slope into cancel culture

Adding to this, the new generation of consumers has become experts at spotting brands that exploit and appropriate important matters for commercial gain without genuine respect or understanding - and they are not afraid to call brands out on it.

It's a slippery slope into cancel culture.

Take the BMW campaign that launched in 2022 just before Heritage Month, *I am my ancestors wildest dream* with the word ancestors crossed out.

BMW got it wrong. It tried to use a popular phrase without understanding the context and the originating philosophy, to try to look cool and appeal to a younger market. In the end, BMW achieved quite the opposite and offended millions of Africans.

The social media storm that erupted was intense with people calling out the campaign as offensive and racist – from major celebrities to media personalities jumping into the conversation as well.

BMW's misstep in their campaign rollout proves that even the most finely-tuned engines can't outrun the backlash of tone-deaf marketing manoeuvres, leaving their reputation in need of a serious recall.

Authenticity and appreciation

So, the question is: how can brands participate in special days, and contribute positively?

The secret to getting it right is simple. Authenticity and appreciation.

Let's talk about authenticity. Yes, it's, the overused and abused word in advertising, but it is the fact of the matter.

It's all about being real. In an age of social media, short attention spans and competition for eyeballs, brand authenticity is the name of the game.

Don't try to force a brand into a space where it is not aligned. Brands need to understand their narrative before they can weave stories of significance into their storytelling efforts.

A deep understanding and appreciation of the matter is essential.

Understanding the cultural context and significance of certain matters allows brands to create campaigns that are respectful and inclusive.

Without this understanding, brands risk inadvertently offending or alienating their target audience by misrepresenting or trivializing important cultural or social issues.

Teams working on campaigns like these should do thorough research, having a sincere interest around the topic. Trust me, the receipts of your research will show.

Nando's #RightMyName: Nailed it

A personal favourite is Nando's *#RightMyName* campaign launched in 2018 in commemoration of Human Rights Day. This campaign nailed authenticity and appreciation.

The goal was simple — remove spellcheck's red line from our non-traditional English names.

The campaign didn't just touch on a topic, it spoke to South Africans on a personal level and gave them a simple but significant sense of empowerment.

It was a genuine approach that honoured the identities of millions of South Africans, from a personal and cultural point of view.

It's not about squeezing an awareness day into your marketing strategy just to join the conversation.

Authenticity is about sincere commitment to honouring the values tied to the day. Campaigns where brands show up with authenticity and appreciation will win.

Forget about cashing in on the occasion. Focus on bringing value and context to the day to truly benefit your brand and connect with your consumers.

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