

Sleazeball marketing... or not?

By Janine Lazarus

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On the eve before the world's TV cameras will be allowed for the first time into a courtroom to televise the trial of legendary Paralympian Oscar Pistorius, and while talk shows still teem with furious debate over the issue of the invasion of privacy, a dubiously innocuous marketing tactic on the part of a Cape Town bakery was called publicly into question.

What might have seemed to its owners like a good idea at the time, a piping hot batch of cookies with the Blade Runner's meme downloaded from the internet and printed on icing, left nothing more than a singularly bad taste in its patrons' mouths.

With phrases such as "Like a bullet" and "Caution: Using toilet - please don't shoot," and of course, "And the Oscar goes to....Jail," the owners of Charly's Bakery tried fruitlessly to apologise by stating on social media that their controversial cookies were not intended for sale. "Our intention was to stimulate debate."



Image source: www.memeburn.com

Well, that it did indeed. But what this questionable campaign and others of its ilk has done is to cast a rather unwelcome light on the fact that marketing sometimes teeters on the very knife edge of the morally grey.

A dose of good and very necessary satire

Call the cookie campaign a dose of good and very necessary satire if you will, and accuse those lambasting the bakery as people with no sense of humour, but there can be little doubt that there was a rather costly price to pay in exchange for spearheading a public discussion.

If we agree that marketing is the main link between your customers and your brand, how weird, distasteful or even ethically questionable must gimmicks be when it comes to pushing the marketing envelope? Should the line be drawn at some point?

The cookie crumbles somewhat differently...

The cookie has crumbled somewhat differently for a Limpopo man who has latched limpet-like onto the noble idea of promoting virginity.

Convinced that the SA Virgin Girls Awards will be just the ticket to halt the spread of HIV/Aids and prevent unwanted pregnancies, Rabelani Ramali's intentions may be pure, but one wonders if he has taken the small matter of human rights violation into consideration in his campaign.

Hell-bent on driving his message of abstinence home, Ramali has pulled out all the stops. If he can get funders to back his cause, maidens will be able to earn as much as R100,000 for holding onto their virginity and even be bestowed with gold, silver or bronze medals.

One has to wonder if this remarkable quest to enshrine the collective country's maidenhood dawned on him before or after he fathered five children - by four women - out of wedlock. Mind you, if good marketing, according to the experts, needs to start with a cause and promote values, you can't fault this man from Phiphidi Village.

The mind boggles around the complexities of chastity verification, or even around what kind of questions may be asked on the application forms...

What marketing undoubtedly does though, is it offers us a view of the world.

ABOUT JANINE LAZARUS

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