

The politics of branding: Does politics need good marketing?

By  Michelle Beh

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At the end of last year, my team and I were approached to help launch a new political party. It was a rather interesting experience as we have never done any work in this category before. We had to develop a new brand, launch it and influence people to vote for it - all within four months.

“ The experience reinforced my belief in the power of branding and how a challenger brand can stand out and make its mark.

”



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Break the rules

No, don't break the law, but the rules of the category. With very little time and a much smaller budget than incumbent parties, we had to do things differently.

Our first task was to come up with a name. Instead of using an acronym like the other parties, we decided on a name that could stand on its own and represent what the party stands for.



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When it came to the logo design, we started from the end-point and where it matters most – on the ballot sheet. We lined up all the other logos and chose a colour that is distinctive and jumps out. We kept the design simple, so it wouldn't get lost even when the logo is reduced to the size of a cherry.



Image credit: Elliott Stallion on Unsplash.

Positivity kills

Politics is probably the only category – besides maybe insurance – that uses fear as an emotion to drive action. In the midst of so much negative news around us, we chose optimism and hope for the party’s personality and tonality.

It is funny how political parties are allowed to say “Don’t vote for XXX”. That would never work in a business situation – firstly because you’re not allowed to but also why would you spend your money on publicising another brand instead of your own?



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Rather than pointing fingers, we chose to be action-driven. In the doom and gloom of South African politics, we believe that a party with a solutions-driven and inclusive message will stand out and offer an alternative to an audience who is tired of the same old excuses.

Our client was very clear that the change the country needed can’t just be driven by a political party or the government. They felt that the message needs to drive a movement where everyone should feel the need to participate.

So, we created a rally cry that addresses what South Africans need and asked them to join me in taking action. We added a hashtag to the rally cry as I knew that most of the communications would be driven via social media.



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Unlikely partnership

We don't have any experience in politics and our client didn't have experience in marketing. It was refreshing to have a client who trusted us and looked to use for advice.

“ *Branding is an art, not a science.*

”

We relied on consumer research and data to inform our decisions but, ultimately, there really isn't a right or wrong answer. Many a time, our recommendations are based on our experience and knowledge gained from working across different brands and projects.

Working collaboratively between strategy and creative, agency and client, we managed to develop a brand that had an impact and led to success for our client in a very short period.

People and publicity

Most of the work that gave our client the best return probably isn't seen by many.

We gave them a platform that allowed them to rally their support on the ground. While the mass-marketing campaign drove awareness of the brand, it was the door-to-door knocking that garnered the votes they needed.



Despondent slogans

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Mass brands have a lot to learn from how parties gather their support – breaking the country into regions, cities and wards, they activated their supporters to change behaviour (or reinforce a behaviour) one-by-one.

Run, run, run

Did I say we didn't have much time? We enjoy projects where there is a tight deadline with a clear goal.

The new structure where clients work directly with the strategist and creative lead was definitely put to the test as we had to turnaround deliverables in less than half the time it normally takes.

It made us prioritise what was important. Rather than trying to do too much, we went back to basics and made sure we did what was required with the most impact. We had to find new ways to collaborate with partners to execute the solutions quickly.

“ *Shorter deadlines can be a wonderful thing.*

”

My team and I went into the project not knowing what to expect or what the results could be. While it was great to see the power of branding in play, we also had to consider the repercussions of what we were doing.



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We consciously set out to drive a positive message that we hoped would rally people together to create change for good.

Ultimately, we weren't only affecting the bottom line of a business, we were playing a small part in the fate of the nation.

ABOUT MICHELLE BEH

I play a dual role at The Jupiter Drawing Room Cape Town where I drive the existing and new business for the agency, as well as develop brand and communications strategies for our clients such as Burger King SA, Lewis Group, Sasko Bread and Flour, Virgin Group, and KVVW Wines.

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