

# Are you experiencing Women's Month withdrawal?

 By [Kirigo Kamore](#)

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What peeves me about the end of Women's Month is the apparent end of women's issues. Women's Month has come and gone, and with it a plethora of events, campaigns, corporate pledges and sponsorship announcements, all waiting to resurface a year later in the next instalment of this national observance.



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The first week of September, despite its spring-inspired cheerfulness, often feels like the quiet aftermath of a crowded house party; where instead of returning home with the heavy scent of other people's alcohol and the unmistakable hint of cigarette smoke, I return to business as usual with the heavy stench of false promises. I find that the relationship between corporations and Women's Month is akin to that of a one-night stand, and if you're lucky, maybe your business blesser will leave a small wad of cash on the bedside table when it's over.

While some companies (very few) have long had a stake in the progression of women – be it in education, career advancement or human rights - many others treat Women's Month like a covenant of transient rituals called upon once a year to give thanks to the female sex. However, what implication does this short-lived and hyped-up affair have on the long-term empowerment of women?

## 'Happy' doesn't cut it

Now, I'll admit, the word *empowerment* has been publicised ad infinitum, as an umbrella term meant to express all manner of advancement activities. It's kind of a weasel word, to be honest, that corporations use to avoid specifying exactly how they intend to further women. Yet, many brands and agencies don't miss an opportunity to wave their corporate flag throughout Women's Month.

Every year, on the 9th of August, I'm overcome with well-meaning messages flooding my social media feed, all imploring me and my ilk to have a Happy Women's Day. *Happy* being an operative word and one that so vaguely expresses what that actually means in the context of the daily challenges we face. T



## 5 thoughts to bear in mind when targeting women this Women's Month

Cindy Diamond 16 Aug 2018



These messages are often coupled with cheesy emoji's and the latest catchy hashtags reminding me of how awesome, brave, and a what queen I am. Among these, are similar branded messages by chocolate-making, milk-producing, paper printing, toilet-cleaning, gut-cleansing, beauty-enhancing, insurance-providing (you get the point) brands.

However, despite all the good intentions these oft generic platitudes have, my optimism is always tempered by the nagging feeling that most brands have actually missed the point and purpose of Women's Month. More often than not, brands will churn out routine campaigns female marketing tropes with little regard on how this actually reflects on their brands in the long term. By over-endorsing a cause with a superficial objective, we become numbed by the onslaught of ineffective messaging, resulting in the opposite effect of what we're actually trying to achieve.



## Just how female-friendly is the advertising industry?

Kate Wilson 7 Sep 2018



The power of the female economy has been well-accounted for, with several studies estimating their global consumer spend to about \$18 to \$20tn annually. So, it's no secret the women present an incredibly lucrative market to cater to, yet why aren't they being purposefully catered to?

## Purpose should trump publicity

On International Women's Day earlier this year, McDonald's put out a nationwide campaign across 200 of its US chains and its social media platforms, during which it flipped its iconic, golden 'M' logo into a 'W'.

The aim, according to its chief diversity officer – Wendy Lewis – was to honour, “the extraordinary accomplishments of women everywhere and especially in our restaurants.” While this made for quite a nice and newsworthy gesture, I do need to point out that that’s all it was – a gesture. Gestures are easy, gestures are non-committal, and more often than not, gestures are inconsequential.

So, for all the money, publicity and a company-wide crusade that went into flipping letters alongside flipping burgers, how would this campaign evolve beyond honouring women everywhere, into one that advances them?

Perhaps introducing measurable policies and schemes that allow women to take paid maternity leave (yeah, this is still an issue), or protecting employees from potential sexual harassment cases or, better yet, offering women opportunities to upskill themselves within the company and actually fill the so-called leaky pipeline of women in Stem? Given that women are so underserved on a corporate, social, political and economic level; women’s issues are manifold, so brands can pretty much take their pick of whatever cause to commit to.

Making the connection between domestic abuse and alcohol was a sensible no-brainer, hence Carling Black Label’s well-received and successful #NoExcuse campaign. In their mission to take action against domestic violence, they went beyond simply raising awareness to raise ongoing support in an impactful, scalable and measurable way.



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Leigh Andrews 12 Mar 2018



So, I’d like to appeal to brands (and their agency allies) to avoid the myopic tendency to tactlessly jump onto the Women’s Day bandwagon, and actually work towards a more sustainable cause, driven by a sense of purpose that your consumers can actually care about and contribute to. Actually, address an issue and commit yourselves to it in a way that makes it part of your existing brand narrative. With more focus on purpose and less on publicity, you might actually begin to understand the fundamental needs of women, investing more time in finding solutions that in turn may position you favourably in a growing female economy.

## Beyond awareness

As a firm believer in the power of private industry to drive real change, I also believe that there is a place for advertising agencies to shape people’s attitudes and behaviours, beyond raising awareness. When done right, brands and agencies can actually expend as much energy on delivering mutually beneficial results for women and their clients’ brands, as they do on chasing reach and frequency. This is a time for brands to think introspectively about their approach to Women’s Month and women’s empowerment in general, and an exciting time when brands and agencies can craft effective campaigns that are powerful and enduring.

We seem to be at a watershed moment when a great majority of us are very much aware of the myriad challenges women face. So, *awareness* is not necessarily the problem, but rather a lack of commitment to finding consistent, purposeful and meaningful solutions. In an industry chock-a-block with self-proclaimed thinkers, problem solvers, innovators, creatives and strategists, surely finding solutions should be part of the appeal of participating in Women’s Month?

However, if profitability is the only pursuit, then good luck making it in a world where consumers and employees, especially women, are becoming increasingly discerning about who they align themselves with, consciously filtering out those that make claims that don’t appear authentic.



## Gender empowerment will thrive in inclusive workplaces that allow people to be their authentic selves

UCT Graduate School of Business 22 Aug 2018



So, here's hoping that more of you take a stand worth campaigning about and with a purposeful mission actually worth being *happy* about. As for me, I'll be staving off any Women's Month withdrawal symptoms and keeping a close eye on the next wave of female-friendly campaigns, in the hopes that brands actually mean what they say.

### ABOUT KIRIGO KAMORE

Content Manager & Global Diversity Champion at McCann Worldgroup (Johannesburg) Executive MBA Graduate. My love of writing has brought with it an opportunity to meet different people, each of them sharing narratives imbued with wisdom gained from their own "inexhaustible variety of life." Wisdom attained from their own follies and triumphs, thereby inspiring me to try my hand at entrepreneurship.

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