

Juju's marketing genius

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Many marketing and advertising "gurus" seem to view selling products and services as something akin to waging a military campaign; hence the liberal quoting from Sun Tzu, the Chinese general, philosopher and author of the seminal treatise *The Art of War*.



I was wondering, looking at the fact that the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) scored a comprehensive victory over Clicks, Unilever and TRESemmé this week in "Hair Wars", and the fact that the EFF and its members are wannabe soldiers, whether commander-in-chief Julius Malema and his lieutenants had been studying Sun Tzu of late.

Two quotes from the wise Chinese war maker come to mind: "So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong, and strike at what is weak." And "Opportunities multiply as they are seized". Clicks was a soft target, because it fell off the moral and marketing high ground in the first place by allowing a piece of marketing, which should have been spotted as potentially hugely offensive to many people, to get on its website.

Ditto with Unilever, the global giant and parent of the TRESemmé hair care line which caused all the fuss.

Eventually, the chain store and the multinational caved in and grovelled, while the EFF made marketing hay while the sun was shining on them, proving that opportunities do multiply after they are seized.

Looked at it dispassionately – and from a purely marketing point of view – the EFF's handling of the situation was pure genius. A good marketer knows how to use a “basic human truth” to tell a story involving his or her product. And the EFF's appropriation of the basic reality that many black people are still hurting from past and current racial discrimination was always going to get people to listen to their message.

And, like many advertisers and marketers, they linked their own brand message to their “ad” campaign message (apologise for the offence you cause).

In other words, we are the only people who can get black people the respect they deserve, so we are the people to run this country.

All the while, the EFF showed it has sophisticated media manipulators and digitally savvy people who know how to get a message out fast and far. So they are more than mere rabble rousers.

From a marketing point of view, they got maximum bang for their buck – the cost per thousand people reached would have been negligible. That's been their tactic from their formation seven years ago – get the maximum amount of “earned media” coverage.

Or, light the rag and let the media pour petrol on the flames...

All in all, from a marketing perspective, the EFF did an outstanding job and so I will give them an Orchid.

Again, from a marketing perspective, the EFF's “enemies” didn't help themselves – by causing the trouble and then, as Clicks did, trying to blame “junior” people for getting it wrong.

For them, there is an even more appropriate quote from John D Rockefeller (white monopoly capitalist though he may be): “Don't blame the marketing department.

The buck stops with the chief executive.”

Clicks and Unilever both get Onions for their handling of the entire episode.

There are lessons to be learned, even positive ones, from this drama. As a marketer, if you understand your target market and what pushes their buttons, you have already got their loyalty.

Use the media to take your message further by doing something dramatic and newsworthy.

For the competitor products of the EFF – and in particular the ruling ANC – assess what happened here and how they did it.

Compare their product offering to yours and decide on a way to undercut them.

Perhaps your political product, Mr Ramaphosa, needs a makeover.

ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

Brendan Seery has been in the news business for most of his life, covering coups, wars, famines - and some funny stories - across Africa. Brendan Seery's *Orchids and Onions* column ran each week in the *Saturday Star* in Johannesburg and the *Weekend Argus* in Cape Town.

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