

The Chewbacca mask and the power of social media in retail



By [Sarah Britten](#)

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Social media often doesn't live up to the hype. But it can be retail brand building - and sales - gold. Just look at the case of the Chewbacca mask that Candace Payne bought from Kohl's last week. What can South African marketers learn from it?

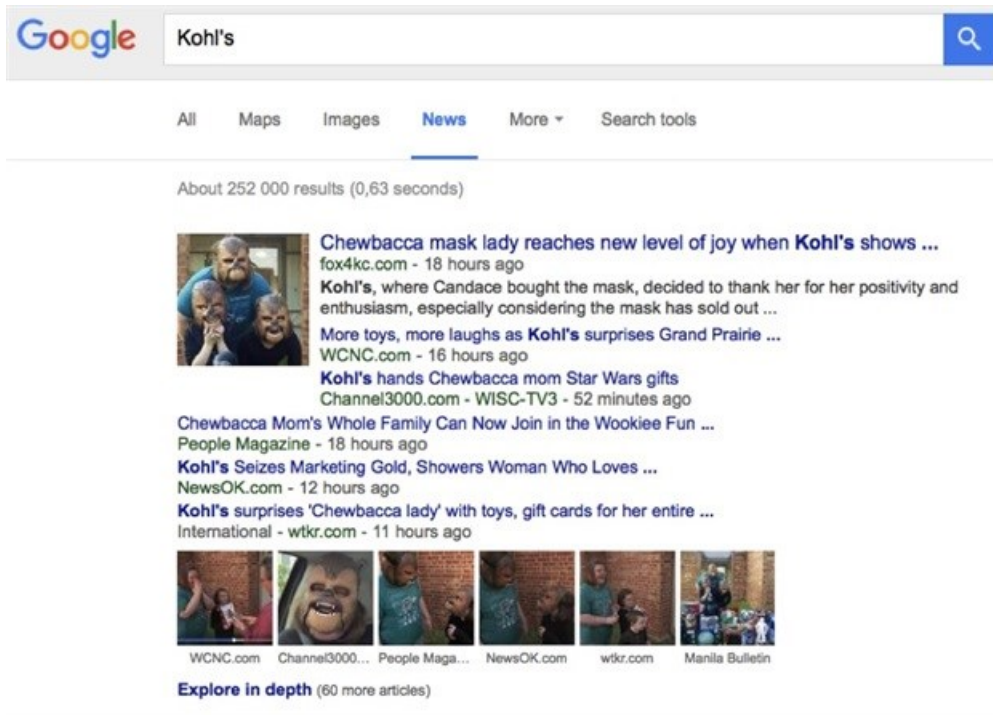
It was a marketer's dream. Ordinary, likeable mom posts Facebook Live video of her unrestrained joy at her Chewbacca mask purchase from Kohl's, the Milwaukee-based department store chain. Video immediately goes massively viral, is shared by BuzzFeed and [Mashable](#), and reaches 135 million views after four days.

That Chewbacca mask she unboxes while parked in her SUV? [Sold out](#) at multiple retailers, including Kohl's, across the country.

The case of Candace Payne and the Chewbacca mask is one of the best examples I've seen of social media working in tandem with a retailer. What can South African marketers learn from it?

1. When social media works well, it works brilliantly.

Not only did the mask sell out within 24 hours of the video appearing; the positive publicity generated for Kohl's has been remarkable. Take a look at recent Kohl's news stories – this is the kind of good news that money can't really buy:



2. Authenticity is everything. How infectious is that laugh? Candace went viral because she was so obviously unscripted. Tonally, the video hit all the marks. This kind of content is very difficult, if not impossible, to script. All you can do is take advantage if you're lucky enough to have a customer evangelise your brand for you like this.

3. The marketing team responded quickly. This is critical – if they'd waited too long, the momentum would have been lost. As it was, two days after the original video was posted, the Kohl's team was at Candace's house loaded with goodies to say thank you for all of the great PR. The views aren't anywhere near the number achieved by the original, but they're still impressive. Half a million likes and 80,000 comments is nothing to sneeze at. Most impressive of all are the close to half a million shares. This is clearly the kind of content that the Kohl's audience loves.

4. They made relevant links to product. Cleverly, Kohl's promoted both gift cards and rewards points as well as their merchandise. The video is a tiny bit tacky – does any family need so much more stuff? – but they do get all-important footage of Candace and her infectious laugh.

5. The agency was involved. Reports indicate that Kohl's planned the [response](#) in partnership with its social agency, Huge. I'm willing to bet that it was the agency that spotted the opportunity and went to their client. Whatever the story behind the visit to Candace Payne and her family, it paid off.

6. Know what to do with a good thing. Candace clearly has that special something that consumers and shoppers relate to. If I were Kohl's and their agency, I'd persuade her to do regular unboxing videos for them. Keep them unscripted and let Candace be herself. Whether her appeal might wane through more exposure is up for debate, but the risk is low and the potential rewards are very appealing.

In the end, Candace Payne and her Chewbacca mask put me in a great mood – not only because she's so much fun to watch, but because she was a reminder that social media can be marketing gold. If there's anything we can learn from Kohl's, it's to take advantage when that kind of gift lands in your lap.

ABOUT SARAH BRITTEN

Dr Sarah Britten has 21 years of experience across various clients and multiple strategic disciplines, including social media and shopper. Her client experience includes Nedbank, Investec, FNB, Bothongo Group, Sanofi, Colgate Palmolive, Aspen, Adcock Ingram, Kraft Heinz, Citroën and Land Rover.

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