

# Branding case history in the making at Woolies

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

7 Sep 2006

It seems to be no coincidence that Woolworths has chosen to aggressively promote its upmarket "W" clothing collection a few months in advance of the arrival of its new retail MD, Andrew Jennings, former chief operating officer of the classy and world-famous Saks Fifth Avenue retail chain in the USA.

This campaign will prove to be a fascinating marketing case history because it has been born out of a heritage of some strange and fairly unique branding contradictions.

## Respected brand

Here we have a corporate brand that for many years has commanded enormous respect and loyalty from the upper LSM target market in terms of everything from high quality fresh produce, foodstuffs and clothing that has always had a reputation for being a cut above everything else in terms of value and quality.

I remember some years ago talking to the chairman of a local clothing manufacturer who showed me over his factory, proudly pointing out the special Woolies production line that was separated from the others in his plant simply because Woolworths quality control procedures were so much more demanding.

His sage advice to me was never to bother even looking at globally branded designer underwear because "for a fraction of the price you can get double the quality at Woolies."

One would think then, that given this strong and enduring upper-LSM brand loyalty to Woolies clothing, they would find it dead easy to flog their upmarket "W" collection by the ton.

But herein lies the rub. Apparently being loyal to Woolies clothing is one thing but actually admitting to wearing Woolies clothing is another matter altogether.

## Uncool moms

In what must be one of the strangest branding anomalies ever, according to a Woolies insider I spoke to recently, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that a lot of women who buy Woolies clothing actually cut the labels off simply because they, or rather their teenage daughters, believe it is decidedly uncool to be seen to be wearing anything that isn't designer in spite of the absolute trust they have in Woolies quality.

Given this strange consumer attitude, the new advertising campaign Jupiter Drawing Room in Cape Town prepared for the Woolworths "W" Collection, makes an enormous amount of sense.

What they've done is gone the testimonial route with ads in business media featuring well-known business people such as Sasol's Christine Ramon, Seeff Properties' Samuel Seeff and other well-known captains of industry all proudly sporting Woolies "W" Collection.

It is a quite brilliant advertising strategy aimed at solving a most peculiar marketing incongruity and my guess is it will work an absolute treat.

I often wonder why more marketers don't go the testimonial route because in this day and age particularly, consumers of all ages seem to be more and more inclined to emulating celebrities.

## Great for airlines

Why for example, haven't airlines used their high profile regular passengers in ads to steal a march on competitors? If any industry was just made for testimonial advertising, it is the airline business.

But, getting back to Woolies, the performance of this particular ad campaign will prove to be a significant and unique case history. One in which the objective is to make already loyal, satisfied and completely committed customers proud enough to admit to it.

## ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on [moerdykc@gmail.com](mailto:moerdykc@gmail.com) and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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