

Twuck my life! Big brand learnings from the twittersphere

By [Andrew Ross](#), issued by [Havas Johannesburg](#)

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So it's been an interesting few days in the twittersphere, with a few big brand Social Media (SoMe) players licking their respective wounds wondering how they managed to get it so wrong.



To be fair, the beauty and charm of twitter, over any other medium, is its immediacy. Pretty much as anything happens, it's being tweeted about. In no time at all, real time content is being generated, distributed and redistributed by the community, to the broader SoMe community; seamlessly integrating across other platforms. A post, a tweet, a tag - all messages are platform agnostic, and end up pretty much everywhere. It's immediate. And real!

The energy and buzz when a post "goes viral" is the pot-of-gold at the end of the rainbow that everyone wants (let's be frank it's why *most* of them are there). My mantra is don't plan to be viral, plan to be awesome!

This immediacy is, bluntly, also twitter's single biggest Achilles heel! There is no such thing as a tweet that goes unseen and nothing just slips gently under the radar. Mistakes rarely go unnoticed as a few brands have learnt the hard way (FNB and the @RBJacobs meltdown?) but over the past few days, the twittersphere has proved again to be brutally honest and incredibly unforgiving.

The first incident I need to declare I was personally involved with. I work in Sports Sponsorships and twitter is a great medium to build relationships with targeted groups of fans. Basically when working with a brand, Social Media is one of the disciplines you *have* to get right!

On Sunday, I picked up a tweet on my timeline that was simply devoid of any taste, subtlety or compassion.

Whilst trying (genuinely) to comment on the grief circulating around the tragic death of *Top Billing*, and CliffCentral.com personality Simba Mhere, a message posted from J&B, hard at work building up to the JB Met just "came out wrong". Very wrong! Horribly wrong!

The official J&B SA twitter account tweeted "Devastated to hear of the passing of Simba Mhere in a car accident last night. Keep his family in your thoughts as you enjoy #JnBMet2015. " It doesn't take a genius to work out this is hardly on strategy, or befitting of a brand of the pedigree of J&B.

I screengrabbed the message, and tweeted at around 12h30 my feelings on the inappropriate wording, and tone of the (already deleted) tweet. The result? An onslaught of commentary around the inappropriateness of the message directed at the brand concerned.

The offending fingers belonged to a freelancer, in for the day, who contacted me to explain he meant no harm and was by his own admission "no social media expert"! He further clarified he had no formal training in the medium nor any real strategy for the day. He later took to Facebook to explain himself, but deleted that post as well, as the sentiment continued to swell against J&B in this regard.

The damage to the brand must have been immense - my own account was trending at #4 in South Africa at the end of the day and the tweet had some 40,000 impressions with an impressive engagement rate and 80-odd retweets!

And here is the big thing! The greatest damage here, besides the obvious reputational issues, has to be the opportunity lost

by J&B to formally and strategically leverage their prime sponsorship asset within the social media space. The account was basically dormant from 14h30 after an angry Twitter mob (twob?) demanded and eventually got an apology, losing for good the opportunity to create, generate and disseminate unique content in the process, that *could* be shared with the community.

By way of explanation, unique, brand-owned content creation should be one of the single largest objectives of sponsorships, given the vast shift in the manner in which the consumers are engaging and interacting with brands. Every brand wants to create fans and connecting with them through their shared passions is the basic premise on which the core concept of sponsorships is built.

To find that a major event the size and scale of J&B Met not only (apparently) had no content strategy in place, but also felt it OK to hand the reigns (see what I did there) of their Twitter account to a self-proclaimed novice whom they told to wander off and find things to tweet about, is mind-boggling in this day and age!

Any brand team, who felt they can "just casually dabble" in this SoMe space, sort of pretty much created this situation themselves. It's the proverbially accident waiting to happen! In the same way I doubt J&B would employ a varsity film club to shoot a new Brand Ad, the social media space deserves the same weight and demands the same respect!

As @News24 found out. The hard way!

What will fast go down, in the archives of Social Media history, as one of the most humorous, and when all the posturing is over, harmless responses to a Twitter F*#c Up, (twukup?) is still unfolding on timelines around the world.

A (for now unnamed) News24 staffer felt the need to emphasise the horrific video and stills of a Taipei plane crash, with a list of expletives so profoundly off-colour as to make sailors around the world blush! Again, the tweet was immediately deleted, but to no avail.

Not only has the tweet resurfaced as a screengrab, but a parody account @Newsf*#king24 has shot to immediate stardom, notching up 3,600 followers in the space of an afternoon. A record @BarryBateman would be envious of.

The good news is there is a lesson here: take the time to fully understand the pitfalls of the medium as well as its strengths: People are people, and that's always going to be the charm and the challenge within the SoME space. The reality is that anyone at the end of a social media account wields immense power. They are the voice, personality and conscience of the brand they represent. There is no time to copy-check, or for that matter sense-check content before it is posted, unless you are moderating a highly controlled content strategy that is scheduled days in advance.

And as two big brands have highlighted in the last few days, there is no time to delete an errant post... someone will *a/ways* have seen it.

Whilst neither of these specific instances are going to topple their respective empires, they should serve as harsh warnings that to engage and build a brand in the Social Media space, is highly specialised and fraught with as many pitfalls as there are benefits.

Get it right, as many competent community managers, strategists and clients often do, and the results are obvious. Get it wrong... and it's just a right royal Twuck Up.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Ross is Managing Director at Havas Sports & Entertainment South Africa.

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