

Nike just does it best

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Taking stand: Ad backs Caster Semenya challenging limitations; Kudos for Emirates Airline for 'doing right thing for our customers'



Source: www.unsplash.com

Given that most popular brands have a wide range of customers, very few of them are prepared to be controversial or to take stands on issues which result in them ending up in the headlines.

Nike, the athletic equipment maker, has no such qualms and has made taking a stand right out in the open a major part of its marketing DNA.

A few years back, one of its brand ambassadors, US football star Colin Kaepernick, generated a firestorm of debate – and protest – over his decision to “take the knee” during the playing of the US national anthem before a game. The quarterback made the gesture in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Outraged conservatives threatened to boycott Nike products – but the reality was that the opposite occurred, with the company actually doing better without the boycotters.

It was a risky gamble to take, particularly in the US, where the conservative movement is still very powerful. Cynically, some

might say, though, that your typical Trump-supporting “good ole boy” would not want to let any kind of fitness training get in the way of his campaign to “Make America Great Again” ... so Nike probably wasn’t risking much anyway.

Nike has again stuck its head above the parapet into controversy again over its in-your-face backing of another of its athletics stars, our own Caster Semenya.

*How good can a woman be until
“she’s too good to be a woman”?*

I am Mokgadi Caster Semenya.

I am a woman and I am fast.

*I worked, I trained,
I dedicated my entire life to running.*

That’s what makes me good.

But apparently, too good for some.

*So good that I’m denied the right
to run my race, unless I take medication
to change the body I was born with.*

*So good that I’m left with no choice but
to compete in a distance 6 times longer.*

*So good that my genitalia
and DNA are scrutinised.*

*Why must womanhood fit
within such narrow standards?*

*Being “too good” doesn’t make
a woman any less of a woman.*

*It only challenges limitations
of how good a woman can be.*

NIKE

This week, in a striking double-page print ad run in a few local papers, Nike shouted: Everybody has the right to run.

On the opposite page was an image of Semenya, along with her own forthright views on the ordeal she has been put through by international athletics bodies because she has too many male hormones. She says she is “too good for some”.

“So good that I am denied the right to run my race unless I take medication to change the body I was born with. So good that I am left with no choice but to compete in a distance six times longer.”

She goes on to ask: “Why must womanhood fit within such narrow standards? Being too good doesn’t make a woman any less of a woman. It only challenges the limitations of how good a woman can be.”

The ad is a powerful riposte to injustice and Nike doesn’t sit on the fence. At the same time, the brand is also about urging people to challenge their own limitations, so the message from Semenya neatly dovetails into its marketing, although in a subtle way.

It is cause-related marketing, but that is what people these days are expecting from the brands they love. An Orchid to Nike for taking that stand, for making advertising less bland. And, for reminding people of how powerful a print – with frozen

image and simple wording – can be.

Another global mega brand which went into the public arena all guns blazing last week was Emirates Airline. It was reacting to the announcement by Heathrow airport in London that it, and all other airlines flying there, would have to reduce the number of flights, because the airport cannot cope in the summer rush.

Emirates pulled no punches in one of the strongest-worded press releases I've seen from a major brand, blasting Heathrow management for being "cavalier about travellers and their airline customers."

It added: "LHR chose not to act, not to plan, not to invest. Now faced with an 'airmageddon' situation due to their incompetence and non-action, they are pushing the entire burden – of costs and the scramble to sort the mess – to airlines and travellers."

Although the row has now been resolved – with Emirates agreeing to abide by the restrictions until the end of August, one sentence was key in the statement: "Emirates believes in doing the right thing by our customers."

“ Ladies and gentlemen...I give you, the press release of the year: pic.twitter.com/K60Pt5o3SE
— Optimistic Nihilism (@yazurd) [July 20, 2022](#) ”

Given that most of those customers will be extremely angry at what Heathrow has done, the fact that Emirates had tried to fight for them would have given them some comfort. How many others would have taken on the airport authority?

Orchid to Emirates for standing up for what is right and for reminding your customers that you do care for them.

Understanding your audience

This week's Onion for Gross Insensitivity goes to Investec's online team for the social media campaign flouting at the same time as the Reserve Bank increased the interest rate by .75%

In a spectacular example of not reading the room, Investec's promo asked: "What excuses are keeping you from saving? July is National Savings Month and interest rates are a hot topic when it comes to returns on your savings. Do you know what impact the change in the prime interest rate has on your savings?"

As many social media responses showed, most people cannot save because they need every single cent just to survive.

Investec may have had a valid point, but the way in which it was pitched just rubbed salt into the cost-of-living wounds.

What's your excuse for doing that, Investec?

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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