

Some digital lessons from Ard Matthews

 By [Jon Ratcliffe](#)

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Now that the dust has settled following Ard Matthews's unfortunate rendition of the South African national anthem, it's fascinating to look back and see what happened online - and specifically on YouTube - over the last 10 days. It is also interesting to see what an incident of this nature can teach us as digital marketers. [video]

The videos of the initial [performance](#) received a collective 250 000 views on YouTube in the first week. In fact, the highest number of views for a single day on [Youtube.co.za](#), since its launch last year, was recorded on Friday, 26 August 2011. The comments for each of the videos were overwhelmingly negative.

Matthews, however, rather than lying low and hoping it would all blow over, filmed an apology and then performed the anthem passionately and uploaded it to YouTube.

Reading through the comments on that video, it was clear that it had created an overwhelming change in viewer attitude. Users could see that he was truly sorry and had made a mistake and, as proud South Africans, they rallied behind him.

The apology video now has almost 22 000 views, with 88% of the responses being positive. I think this comment summed up the overall sentiment most accurately: "Well done Dude! You have apologised profusely on national radio, taken responsibility for your actions and have shown you can actually do it... What more can be asked of you. Move on and don't let it get you down...!"

So what are the lessons that digital marketers can take away from Matthews's major mishap?

1. The power of online media, and of online video, not only to catch the public's attention, but also to shape their attitudes.

The 'retake' video quickly garnered positive support, rather than jeering. YouTube now has over three billion views a day globally, and South Africa has seen a 175% increase in YouTube views in the past year alone - an ideal medium for marketers to use in order to reach their target audiences.

2. Offline events create online opportunities. This explosion of content created opportunities for savvy marketers to target Ard Matthews's videos with their own relevant advertising. By responding quickly, it's possible for a brand to connect with the zeitgeist, and achieve huge reach in a cost effective manner.

FNB, acutely aware of the value of acting fast, recognised the synergy between its ['stadium anthem' ad campaign](#) and renewed public interest in the national anthem. It quickly acted upon it, using online advertising in a strategic way.

Often there are risks associated with experimentation in the offline world that make implementing creative ideas prohibitively expensive. Therefore, lastly, one of the great things about digital is that the early adopters and innovators get great value for money. This is because they are able to take advantage of the cheaper prices of YouTube ads, while advertiser competition for space is low.

In this [auctioning model](#), demand and supply determines the price of each ad: the earlier an advertiser can react to an opportunity, the less competition exists for that advertising slot, and so better the value.

Ard Matthews isn't the first figure or brand to make a big public blunder, and he certainly won't be the last. The question is: will digital marketers be on their toes the next time such an opportunity arises?

ABOUT JON RATCLIFFE

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