

# The Ford Kuga PR debacle shows how badly social media is managed

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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The burning Ford Kuga issue is not only a PR nightmare but a demonstration of how badly social media is handled in South Africa.

And I am expecting to have my hands full this year showing local companies how to avoid committing brand suicide through ill-conceived PR and especially mishandled social media management.

The notion that “all publicity is good publicity” has been proved wrong in the past week as Ford SA PR and social media is seriously damaging its brand.

The past few months has shown Ford facing a firestorm consumer backlash over an alarming number its Ford Kuga models bursting into flame.

Ford’s PR response has been pitiful and typical of so many car manufacturers who respond to crises by just sitting back and hoping it will all go away. But, Ford’s PR obfuscation, denials and lame media statements are just part of their problem.

Right now Ford SA is continuing to advertise on social media with, for example, Facebook posts promoting their products.

Trouble is that the vast majority of comments to those posts are from disgruntled Ford owners - not only those worried about their Kugas bursting into flame but a host of other complaints.

Of course, social media is a great platform for any brand to encourage complaints so that these can be solved. But, Ford is getting it all wrong.

It is insane to do this via advertising that completely ignores the Kuga crisis as though it belongs on some other planet.

Ford also makes the monumental mistake of responding to these complaints by posting requests along the lines of: “Sorry to hear you are having a problem, please inbox us with your contact details so we can help find a solution.”

Frankly, that is precisely how not to use social media. In this case they are having to ask this question hundreds of times and there is no way they are going to be able to contact all those people quickly enough.

In addition, more and more brands are using this “please inbox us your contact details” ploy as a way of giving some sort

of assurance to all those who read it, that they showing concern and are prepared to do something about it.

Unfortunately far too many companies actually don't respond when customers do send them their contact details. Or take far too long to get back to them.

Brands that are serious about using social media to their advantage need to get used to the fact that they need to continue the conversation on social media for all to see.

Because it is not only the complainant who wants to get some sort of action but every other customer and potential customer looking at the comments section.

Social media is one of the best customer service tools around, but when it is not done properly, as Ford is demonstrating, it can be extremely dangerous.

The sad part of marketing in South Africa is that too many companies believe that they are handling their social media accounts properly when in fact all they are doing is adding fuel to fires.

Outsourcing social media management is one of the most dangerous of all practices. Keeping it in-house but not empowering social media staff is almost just as bad.

Strangely enough, it is a very simple process when it is done right.

When it isn't, it's hell on earth. As Ford is finding with the resale value of Kuga models dropping like lead bricks. Time will tell what it does to new vehicle sales.

Just a couple of hours is all it takes for me to show the way. Give me a call.

## 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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