

Run Jozi: stride in right direction but opportunity for so much more

 By [Maja Rode](#)

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On Sunday, 7 October 2012, I was one of 20 000 runners that traversed the substantial divide between Sandton and Alexandra as part of Nike's '[We Run Jozi](#)' 10km race. Despite the impeccable organisation, challenging route and fantastic vibe, crossing the finish line left me feeling strangely empty.

Like its earlier incarnation, the second '[We Run Jozi](#)' was by all accounts a hit. How often can a running race boast a 100% increase in entries in only six months?

Completely resonates with target market

The success of the concept is testament to an excellent global marketing campaign that has been adapted to local market conditions in a way that completely resonates with Nike's target market here.

Driven by social media and PR, Nike has tapped into many uniquely South African emotions:

- anger ('taking back the streets of Johannesburg'),
- curiosity (the vast majority of runners had never set foot in Hillbrow or Alex), and
- our inherent need to cross the cultural, economic and racial divide once in a while to come together and achieve something great (something that only sports seems to be able to do).

What are we going to do about it?

But here's the problem: now that thousands of Joburg's better-heeled residents have seen how the majority of South Africans live, what are we going to do about it?

Sure, a portion of the entry fee is going towards the establishment of a community running club for Alexandra's youth, and if post-race mutterings and tweets are to be believed, local councillors are about to receive a few hundred indignant letters about the conditions in Alex from the city's wealthier suburbs.

But, beyond that, will the run effect any change at all, or will it simply be filed as a good story to tell the kids one day?

Seems somehow wasteful

It seems somehow wasteful to open so many of our eyes to the realities of life in South Africa without using this newfound knowledge for the greater good.

To me, the race feels unfinished.

Is it Nike's responsibility to ensure that we help the community we have just run through as tourists? No. But would it have been easy for the organisers to harness the boundless enthusiasm and energy on the day for something a little more meaningful to the residents of Alex than they did? Definitely.

How to have achieved greatness

If every runner had picked up a single piece of trash during the run, or informal traders were used to supply the water points, or every runner brought a recycled item of sportswear to give to the children lining the road, we could claim to have run and achieved '[#greatness](#)'.

But, as things stand, the campaign seems a little one-sided and the mutual back-patting of little consequence to the people whose lives we disrupted for a few hours on Sunday as we high-fived our way through their reality.

ABOUT MAJA RODE

Maja Rode is an account director at Corporate Image (www.corporateimage.co.za). With qualifications in marketing, economics and business administration, she's a firm believer in the power of smart communication, of which she thinks there is a serious shortage in SA. Maja believes that PR, driven by the increasing integration with social media platforms, will play an increasingly important role in the boardroom - no more boobs-and-balloons. Email Maja@corporateimage.co.za; follow [@majarode](#).

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