

When done well, ads get people talking about that particular brand or campaign, and one should never underestimate the value of “talkability” in today’s increasingly connected world of social media. Think of the last few commercials you have discussed with friends or shared on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc. Even if you had seen them before you would probably be happy to watch most of them again.

But while being liked does not necessarily guarantee you can sell more product, it is however, in any marketing model, the first step towards driving awareness and creating an emotional engagement with the consumer. The more emotionally engaging the ad, the more memorable it becomes, making the brand more easily recalled and more likely to be chosen.

It’s all in the story

So what do South Africans love when it comes to watching telly? Stories with great South African moments, real human moments reflecting human truths and that quintessential slice of life. Why? Because everyone loves a good story. They are the reason we stay up late to finish a book, watch a movie or binge watch on Netflix. Says Jonathan Gottschall, author of *The storytelling animal: how stories make us human*, “We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.”

Stories engage us like nothing else, they are the signals within the noise, and stories with emotional relevance and creative engagement are critical to an ad’s success. Put simply, great advertising is story-telling with a purpose. It’s that lump in your throat when you watch ads like Postbank’s “Lobola” and Old Mutual’s “Mrs Ratlhogo’s” timeless stories, or the slice of life in Vodacom’s “Wedding”. Of course, not forgetting Klipdrift’s “Met eish” commercial that cemented the term “eish” into colloquial vocabulary.

Lots of LOLs

Saffers love humour (according to our latest BrandZ report, 20% more than any other nation actually), and ads like Nando’s “We can fix our s#*t”, Fiat Palio’s “The cyclist”, City Lodge’s “We’ll make you feel more at home”, DStv’s “Hole in one”, Spur’s “Signwriter” and Vodacom’s “Naartjie” keep us coming back for more. But funny is hard, as Winston Churchill once said, “A joke is a very serious thing”. While Cremora’s hilarious “It’s not inside, it’s on top” ad was a huge hit back in the day, it lost the impact the second time around. That being said, Sasol’s recent remake of the “Glug glug” ad, “This is more than fuel, this is #GlugGlug”, came in at #1 in Q2’s Best Liked Ads of 2019.

Dogs and babies – the truth is out

And while legend has it that babies and puppies are a guarantee of success, it’s only Sanlam’s “Baby race”, “Baby boss” and Vodacom’s “Baby” babies in the top 35 (and let’s not forget Cadbury’s unborn “triplets”). And astonishingly not one dog! (Well, bar Roger’s supporting role in “Glug Glug”). Instead we see Bacardi’s “Tom cat” take centre stage paving the way for the feline internet revolution, proving once again that cats are in fact the superior species. There are however a good handful of cute kids, amongst them Yogisip’s “Praise singer”, who helped launch its new product, and Istvan Gyori, the little kid who stole our hearts back in 1999 with Sasol’s “Glug glug” ad.

Work with the brain, not against it

The uncomfortable truth for brand managers and advertisers is that people don’t care about brands or ads, so their brains filter them out. Ads which engage people creatively and emotionally tend to work better because they’re working with the brain, not against it.

When ads deliver explicit functional messages, they are unlikely to benefit the brand to the same degree as an ad focused on building engagement. *Drumroll* goes to Audi’s “Turtle” ad that in the day, broke the mould in car advertising. As the story goes, the client approved the concept, but in the 11th hour, had a wtf moment and said he couldn’t possibly sell a million-rand car using a turtle (in the campaign there were also fish and snails). The creative director asked client to take a leap of faith, which he eventually agreed to. And the rest as they say is history. The ad went on to win Audi’s “best ad in the world”, brought home a Loerie and was shortlisted at Cannes.

Show don't tell

SAA's "Bird" TVC, Samsung's "Sister" and "Seagull", and Sta-Soft's "Five reasons" ads are great examples of when there is a need to reinforce functional benefits while delivering the message in a creative way. People tend not to remember explicit messages without lots of repetition and a creative demonstration will help improve memorability. A great example is how Samsung's brilliant creative communicates the features of the phone without leaning into technical jargon, while the functional benefits of the device create purposeful and emotional experiences.

The power of music

We also see some great music to engage the senses and make emotional connections, and often, the lyrics are connected to the message the brand is intending to deliver. VW's "VW you and me" jingle really added emotion to the advert, the employees' pride in their company was palpable. Ads like ISM "Elephants", "The road is long", and the epic Queen and Sun City "We will rock you" are great examples of music adding to the power of the creative. Joe Mafela's "It's good good good it's good it's nice" Chicken Licken jingle also resonated hugely, and for those of you old enough to remember, bet you will be singing that in your head all day now!

Made to travel

We see a couple of global ads; Heineken's "Walk-in-closet", Bacardi's "Tom cat", Coke's "I like to dance", LG's "3D TV", Audi's "String" and Samsung's "Sister" and "Seagull" ads, all telling universal stories that consumers around the world can relate to. But topping the pops and a #ProudlySouthAfrican moment, it's great to see that the majority of the winning ads come from South African agencies.

Hall of fame

High fives to Vodacom and Coke who have the most number of ads in the Top 35 Best Liked Ads, with four and three ads respectively, and to Ogilvy and FCB South Africa with eight and six ads respectively.

But who is the *best* of the best? The accolade goes out to Sasol's "Glug glug" ad from Lindsay Smithers FCB, now FCB South Africa, that retains its pole position as *the Best Liked Ad* of all time (well the last 35 years and in South Africa anyway!) So what was the magic formula that makes this ad so loved?

We chatted to the team who were involved in the making of the ad, and there are some really interesting stories we thought we'd share, this is who we spoke to. Andriesa Singleton was the Sasol client, and was the Marketing Communications Officer for Sasol Oil back in the day. It was her first job, fresh out of university. In her first year, she was tasked with

finding a new ad agency for Sasol Oil. Several agencies were shortlisted, and Lindsay Smithers FCB won the pitch. From the start, she said “there was a great rapport with everyone involved, the agency made me part of the process right from the concept stage and I trusted their vision.”

“In all my years in advertising I never worked with a more trusting client than Andriesa Singleton,” says Les Sharpe, the Film Director on “Glug glug”, “she was tough but fair... once she was happy with strategy and direction she trusted us to execute the plan and take things to the next level. Making ads is easy, making history is something hard and it takes a trusting client to give you the scope. Most amazing client I ever worked with.”

The brief was to differentiate Sasol from their competitors, and they did this by defining their meaningful difference as performance, with the strategically brilliant pay-off line, “pump up your performance”. It took just one ad to get this right.

“Glug glug” was the brain child of Gaby Bush, who was the Creative Director at the time, and Les Sharpe, the Film Director who brought it to life. Says Gaby, “Sasol was a hard client, they were engineers and had big expectations, but they gave us the creative freedom to stick our necks out, but that being said, the whole job was very collaborative.”

“It was all shot ‘in camera’ and every detail carefully planned. Post production didn’t exist back then unless you were a Hollywood director,” remembers Les. “Istvan Gyori, the little boy who acted in the commercial was really young so didn’t really know exactly what the script was, we just started shooting, and all of his reactions were shot in real time,” adds Chris Briggs, the producer from Sharpe Productions.

Describing his memories of the shoot, Istvan recalls it felt like actual magic being part of the production, and said what you see was very real, “they even let off a gunshot – I had no idea this was going to happen, so that moment of shock on my face when the car raced off, it was from that! I was quite famous after the ad, people stopped me at the supermarket asking for my autograph – I was so young I couldn’t even write at the time! The team on the shoot were great, it felt like they treated me like an adult. I had a bicycle to play with between takes, the shoot took just over a day back then, but as a kid it felt like forever.”

“Even the dog Roger was an amateur, everyone thought back then he had been trained to perform his trick in the ad”, recalls Gaby. “Les was playing ball with the dog for a while, and then popped the ball in the car, the dog by then was so pumped up (LOL) with the ball that he ended up pushing the car trying to get the ball out, and this all got captured in the moment. Actually, all the effects in the ad were all real. We really had a lot of fun, they were the best days of our lives.”

Dr Thomas Oosthuizen was the Group Director for Planning and Marketing at the agency and was part of the process to the point of production. “He was strategically brilliant” said Gaby. Impact Information, now Kantar, was the research agency who worked on the project at the time. Interestingly, when the ad was first conceptualised, the storyboard had mom coming in near the end and yelling at the kid about the mess, but through testing and a qualitative review, it was discovered this did not resonate.

Says Les, “I agreed with the research, the little twist would have taken up about six to eight seconds of the 30-sec spot... and it didn’t pay rent in terms of what the brand stood for. For me everything had to live up to the pay-off line ‘pump up your performance’. The one thing I always believed in is that if the consumer doesn’t like the ad, they won’t like the product and I honestly think Erik du Plessis had the same opinion. I’m delighted to learn that after almost 30 years this is still up there as the most liked TV spot in the history of South African advertising.” Ironically the ad never won a Loerie but won in England, Cannes and the USA.

There you have it folks! Congrats to the winning brands and agencies who have kept us entertained for the last 35 years. There are lots of awards out there, but these are the adverts that have been chosen as the Best Liked by the South African audience whom we believe to be the most important critic - the person who ultimately chooses to buy your brand or not.

And lastly, it’s worth mentioning that these ads are from our Adtrack database that currently stands at over 100,000 TV adverts tested, and more than 1.1 million interviews conducted, making this database one of the largest of its kind in the

world. Simply put, the top 35 Best Liked Ads are in the 99.9th percentile of all ads flighted in South Africa. No mean feat! #BestLikedAds

The ^{best liked} ads 1984 - 2018

Year	Brand	Ad name	Creative Agency
1984	South African Airways	Birds	(Lindsay Smithers FCB) FCB South Africa
1985	Cremora	It's not inside	(Partnership in Advertising and Marketing) Publicis
1986	Sun City	We will rock you	(Grey Phillips Buntun Mundel & Blake) Grey South Africa
1987	Sanlam	Baby race	(Lintas Cape Town) Mullen Lowe
1988	Volkswagen	WV you and me	(Ogilvy & Mather Rightford Searle Tripp & Makin Cape Town) Ogilvy Cape Town
1989	ISM	Elephants	(Ogilvy & Mather Rightford Searle Tripp & Makin Johannesburg) Ogilvy Johannesburg
1990	Chicken Licken	Taxi two	Wilsenach Communications
1991	Sasol	Glug glug	(Lindsay Smithers FCB) FCB South Africa
1992	Old Mutual	Mrs Rathogo	(Ogilvy & Mather Rightford Searle Tripp & Makin Cape Town) Ogilvy Cape Town
1993	Coca-Cola	I like to dance	McCann Erickson
1994	Coca-Cola	Always	McCann Erickson
1995	Sanlam	Baby boss	(Lintas) Mullen Lowe
1996	Yogisip	Praise singer	Joe Public
1997	Sta-Soft	Five reasons	(Y&R) VMLY&R
1998	Vodacom	Naartjie	(Draftfcb) FCB South Africa
1999	Sasol	Baby pram	(Draftfcb) FCB South Africa
2000	Fiat Palio	Cyclist	(Hercules DMB&B) The Jupiter Drawing Room
2001	Bacardi Breezer	Tom cat	McCann Erickson London
2002	Audi	Turtle	(Ogilvy & Mather Rightford Searle Tripp & Makin Cape Town) Ogilvy Cape Town
2003	Postbank	Lobola	The Agency
2004	City Lodge	We'll make you feel more at home	TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris
2005	Klipdrift	Met eish	(Draftfcb) FCB South Africa
2006	Vodacom	Mo's Girlfriend	(Draftfcb) FCB South Africa
2007	Coca-Cola	Brrrr	(Ogilvy & Mather Rightford Searle Tripp & Makin Johannesburg) Ogilvy Johannesburg
2008	Audi	A4 Strings	DDB Barcelona
2009	Heineken	Walk-in closet	TBWA\NEBOKO Netherlands
2010	Dstv	Hole in one	Studio Zoo
2011	LG	Cinema 3D smart TV more fun	HS Ad
2012	Spur	Sign writing	Haas Advertising
2013	Vodacom	Baby	(Ireland/Davenport) Collective ID
2014	Cadbury	Triplets	(Ogilvy & Mather Johannesburg & Velocity Films) Ogilvy Johannesburg & Velocity Films
2015	Vodacom	Wedding	(Ogilvy & Mather Johannesburg) Ogilvy Johannesburg
2016	Samsung Galaxy S7	Sister	Leo Burnett Chicago
2017	Samsung Knox	Seagull	Ogilvy London
2018	Nando's	We can fix our S#*t	M&C Saatchi Abel

*(Agency name at the time of flighting) Current agency name

While we endeavour to correctly attribute agency names, if there are any discrepancies please let us know

About Adtrack

[Adtrack™](#) is Kantar's proprietary advertising testing system, evaluating the impact and liking of all brand advertising in South Africa for over 35 years. The resultant database stands at over 100,000 TV adverts tested, and more than 1.1 million interviews conducted, making this database one of the largest of its kind in the world. Find out how your creative and media benchmarks against the competition! Adtrack is the most comprehensive and sophisticated post launch evaluation and planning efficiency tool available. A commissioned Adtrack study offers deeper insight and understanding on the performance and effectiveness of your ads. Through the use of Kantar's Media Optimiser tool, we are able to recommend the optimal future flighting of ads, to maximise your return on investments. Adtrack studies are available across all media channels.

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Kantar is the world's leading marketing data, insight and consultancy company. We know more about how people live, feel, shop, vote, watch and post worldwide than any other company. Working across the entire sales and marketing lifecycle, we help brands uncover growth in an extraordinary world. Kantar is part of WPP and its services are employed by over half of the Fortune 500 companies in 100 countries. For further information, please visit us at www.kantar.com.

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