

When brands are a matter of life and death

 By [Sarah Britten](#)

20 Apr 2016

Brands matter. Of course they do - and it's the job of most of you reading this to make sure that brands are meaningful to those who use them.

But no brand has mattered to me as much as General Electric on the morning of 27 February this year. That's when I saw my daughter in the NICU at Sunninghill Hospital for the first time since giving birth to her the afternoon before, two months before her due date.

She lay, impossibly small and pink, hooked up to a drip and covered with probes, in a [General Electric Giraffe](#) incubator. This collection of plastic and wiring was what was keeping her warm and alive. The matching cover, made out of a cheerfully cute giraffe pattern, was a reassuring touch in an environment filled with the paraphernalia of saving the tiniest of lives.

I've spent a lot more time than planned in hospital this year, and during those days and weeks, brands that meant little or nothing to me took on new significance.

[Welch Allyn](#) is not a brand I'd ever heard of, but it became central to my days after my OB/GYN picked up dangerously high blood pressure during a routine check-up and promptly admitted me to the maternity ward with possible pre-eclampsia. It was a Welch Allyn blood pressure monitor that offered the verdict on whether my blood pressure meds were working – another brand, [Adalat](#) – and whether I'd have to have an emergency C-section long before I'd even thought of buying wipes or bum cream.

High blood pressure was not the only problem. After reading that cherries can reduce uric acid, I became obsessed with Food Lover's Market's own brand cherries in syrup and ate vast quantities of them.

When the cherries failed to work, my blood results started to point towards renal failure and I had to have the emergency C-section after all, other brands suddenly came into intense focus. The General Electric Giraffe incubator. [Vygon](#), Nutrisafe feeding tubes and syringes. [Medela](#) breast pumps and attachments. Nuk bottles for the breast milk, stored in the NICU fridge.

All through this time, I saw the Netcare logo everywhere: on the crockery, the bedlinen, the nurses' uniforms, on my baby's blanket. Every now and then, emails would come through from Discovery. I've been critical of Discovery in the past, but this time they were there when I needed them most. I'm in my self-payment gap now, but they covered the hospital care that saved my life and my baby's and that's all that matters.

These brands took on a totemic power for me during the last two months, because they were brands that made the difference between life and death. It has been a reminder of what the best brands are all about: the power to make a real difference to lives, and to do it consistently.

ABOUT SARAH BRITTEN

Dr Sarah Britten has 21 years of experience across various clients and multiple strategic disciplines, including social media and shopper. Her client experience includes Nedbank, Investec, FNB, Bothongo Group, Sanofi, Colgate Palmolive, Aspen, Adcock Ingram, Kraft Heinz, Citroën and Land Rover.

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