

Virgin 'Activism': A moving fitness campaign

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

29 Jan 2016

When your marketing and advertising teams gel well, you get campaign magic. The well-timed Virgin Active 'Get off your ass' campaign is proof of this, particularly its gif-based social media aspect.

Another new year, another ad prompting us to get to the gym? Yes, but the Virgin Active SA 'Get off your ass' campaign has a little something extra. More than just promoting the features of health club membership, it touches on the fact that December has been a month of indulgence for many, making January the focus of a slew of resolutions about changing habits and fresh starts.

It's proven so popular it's been awarded a [hard-won advertising Orchid](#) and has sparked a second phase titled '[gifoffyourass](#)', which challenges people to express themselves and their fitness goals on social media, using fun gifs featuring the characters from the TV commercial. In case you've missed it on TV, the ad is embedded below:

Now how does this level of effective advertising come about? To get the full picture I got insight from both the client and agency involved: Tseliso Rangaka, executive creative director at Ogilvy Cape Town speaks from the advertising angle, while Zeyad Davids, chief sales and marketing officer of Virgin Active explains the marketing thinking...

1. Explain the Virgin Active-Ogilvy working relationship.

Rangaka: Our relationship with the Virgin Active team is one based on mutual respect and trust. They feel comfortable knowing that we understand their business and are vested in its success. Likewise, we enjoy the appreciation they have for what we can do for the brand. This partnership has enabled us to push each other into a brave, interesting space that is also very Virgin.

Davids: We recently appointed O&M Cape Town to handle our public relations and digital business and could feel an immediate positive chemistry with the team. We have a high regard for the agency's fully integrated approach to creativity and their depth of knowledge, but it really all gelled in terms of a relationship over the ATL campaign, the first ideas for which came about in an informal brainstorming session. The creative team took the ideas and turned them around incredibly fast. No problem was too big and they were open to robust debate. We knew we wanted something upbeat,

something provocative, something we hoped would get South Africans to smile. From then on it was trust and some very good ideas that we all agreed on. That takes a fast grasp of what Virgin Active SA is all about and we were thrilled at the outcome.

2. Expose the Virgin Active SA brand personality and how it matches up to its target consumers.

Davids: Virgin has really set the tone globally for decades with its brand of cheeky, often provocative creative. Virgin Active SA carries that tone through in how we approach fitness. We're a health club not a gym, and a brand that understands how to be young and exuberant when it comes to health and wellness, at the same time embracing our "young, old, fit, unfit, you're all welcome," message. The brand personality has to maintain a multi-level conversation with its members. We believe we really get that exercise can and must be fun, must offer a wide range of options, including the latest in technology and innovative products to keep members engaged for life.

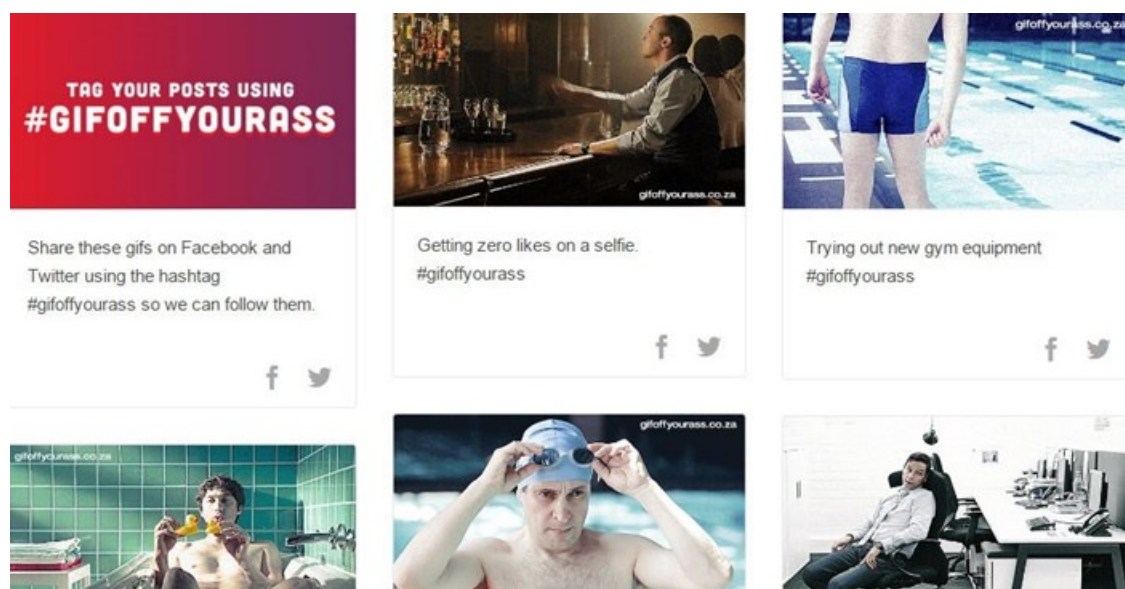
3. Looking to this ad in particular, interesting take in challenging viewers to do something about the status quo. Is this a new form of 'ad activism'?

Rangaka: Virgin Active is about more than just gym and exercise. They're about enabling a healthy, active lifestyle, which in turn allows people to confidently pursue their goals. Our aim was to connect this higher purpose to the desire we all have to improve our lives. To do this effectively, we needed to motivate people and get them to believe they can also lead healthy, happy lives. All they need to do is get up and get active! The song we used was a collaboration between the agency team, the film director and client. It was written to be motivational, but in a way that's sympathetic to our human fallibility. We decided to go with a big-band, swing arrangement and playful lyrics to keep it within Virgin Active's tongue-in-cheek tonality.

Davids: People know that exercise is good for them, but what is it that stops you from making that first move? Our current TV commercial gets the message of 'get up and get active' across in several, everyday scenes and via a playful song with lyrics that highlight our tendency to put fitness on hold and ruining well-intentioned goals. Yes, we took a calculated chance with the tone and content of this TVC, but we've had an incredibly positive response from members and the public. We believe it's just what SA needs at this time - time out to laugh - and we'll continue in this vein.

4. What's response been like since the ad's first flighting?

Rangaka: Up until now, the responses to the ad have been overwhelmingly positive. We are thrilled to see how many people enjoy the ad and how many positive feedback was heaped on the Virgin Active brand. I think the reason for this is that people relate to the characters in the ad. It takes a light hearted approach at persuading people to get up and active.



5. Will there be further follow-up ads to extend the message throughout the year?

Dauids: Definitely. And there's a lot to talk about. Double digit growth with club openings and some really exciting product offerings based on global trends and feedback from SA members. We'll advertise all year through a wide variety of channels but our over-arching message particularly for 2016, is "Get Up and Get Active". What we hope to expand on is messaging on Virgin Active's value for money proposition and incredible breadth of offering with Virgin Active RED, LifeCentre clubs and Classic Collection; 124 clubs and a fee structure that starts at under R200.

6. What can we expect from the "Gif Off Your Ass" social media element?

Rangaka: It's a social campaign developed by the Ogilvy PR team to support the television commercial. The [digital platform](#) hosts gifs featuring different characters from the TVC. People can download and share the gifs on their personal social platforms to accompany their posts, which gives the campaign a 360-degree feel. Gifs are a rising trend in digital marketing and are playing an increasingly important role in sharing news online, telling stories through photojournalism and also in giving us new ways to express ourselves.

That's your call to get involved! What's not to love about moving pictures (gifs) that inspire you to move around and get fit? Visit '[gifoffyourass](#)' to find out more.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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