

What does it mean to be 'cool' and 'relevant' in brand building?

 By [Bogosi Motshegwa](#)

14 Jun 2017

Brands across the board, especially South African brands, are failing dismally with regards to being relevant, particularly when it comes to the so-called millennials (by the way, by virtue of pursuing this target segment, does not automatically make your brand 'cool' or 'relevant').



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The major reason being that they try to latch on to trends which have no strategic logic to either the brand itself or business objectives.

You cannot only talk coolness or relevance

If you look closely at brands, across industries and categories, you'll realise that they are starting to look and talk the same in the same tone, as if they are communicating from the same template. For example; a lot of brands have started to communicate around the cultural context resembling the Braamfontein scene, Maboneng or Arts on Main.

The opportunity cost of trying to be relevant is that you lose yourself. Brands drown in the need to be relevant. They become bland and non-differentiated.

Being at Maboneng or Arts on Main does not make your brand 'cool' or 'relevant'. You'll have to do more than that to actually be cool or relevant. If you want your brand to be cool (whatever that means), you'll actually have to be cool. FNB did not become the best digital bank by simply advertising online or on digital platforms; their entire business was shifted into the digital space. 'Digital' was the platform on which their core services were delivered. Capitec bank is not growing exponentially by speaking simplicity, they live it, and people can therefore attest to their brand proposition or promise.

“By virtue of pursuing this target segment, your brand does not automatically become ‘cool’ or ‘relevant’.”

Actually being cool and relevant

You don't talk coolness or relevance, you live it. Living relevance means acting what you say you are, and not just paying lip-service. You'll have to define what 'relevance' looks, feels and sounds like. Relevance is not according to a trend, but based on your brand's identity.

Brands simply want to be relevant with no other reason than just being relevant. Brands want to be cool for no other reason than just being cool. What does ‘being cool’ mean? Relevance is not just about being 'present' or 'talked about'.

In this particular example; wanting a similar target audience or wanting to be relevant, has influenced the creative execution of the message. The creative executions by both Standard Bank and Nike respectively, from two completely different categories - which are worlds apart, have used the same people. Well, I suppose, that is the trend, right?

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A post shared by Manthe Ribane (@manthe.ribane) on Mar 17, 2017 at 12:32am PDT

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Defining 'coolness' and 'relevance'

Simply; the currency for 'cool' and 'relevant' is association. Association is about wanting to be part of something. Association is desirable because there's value in being linked to something or someone. The operative word being 'value'. So, by simply being at Maboneng or as a brand linking to famous artist, what value is there for consumers and customers?

FNB became 'cool' and 'relevant' because the value proposition or promise was and still is tangible. You can literally touch and actually feel their 'how can we help you'. They recently launched a new service where their customers can renew their vehicles license discs online through them. Now isn't that cool?

Still want to be cool?

As a brand, how are you making cool tangible? If you can answer that; you are on your way to being relevant because people will have the desire to want to associate with you.

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You'll have to live and breathe coolness and relevance, you can't just talk it. You have to create the desire for people to want to be part of your brand's ecosystem, one way or the other. 'Coolness' and 'relevance' are actually hard work.

Are you ready to work?

ABOUT BOGOSI MOTSHEGWA

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