

Castle Lager gets surprise ROI on sponsoring Bafana Bafana

By  [Brendan Seery](#)

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Millions of South African sports fans would have been on the edges of their seats on Saturday night as the quarterfinal of the African Cup of Nations (Afcon) went into extra time and a penalty shoot-out, with our goalkeeper-captain Ronwen Williams saving four penalties to send Bafana Bafana through to the semi-finals of the tournament.



Return on investment

But just as tense would have been the people associated with the marketing of Castle Lager, which has been a sponsor of the national football team for the past 30 years. Let's face it, they haven't exactly seen a good return on their emotional and financial investment in Bafana Bafana in that time.

Its most recent big campaign for *The Backup Squad* would have been particularly apt when aired ahead of this Afcon

tournament.

The ad's message is that "our team" needs a backup squad, from the backup coach, to the backup striker, to the backup goalie and even the backup "benchwarmer".

It's a cool idea and there is plenty of energy in the execution. However, I couldn't help but notice that the scenario was pretty vague about who "our team" actually is... there were no clearly visible Bafana shirts, compared to the always present Springbok shirts in the ads around the Rugby World Cup last year.

It seems to me that the marketing people were hedging their bets – after all, even if the national team tanked at Afcon, the ad could still run. On the other hand, too much overt Bafana plugging would have fallen embarrassingly, and probably expensively flat (in terms of media spend).

Cleverly done overall. So, it gets an Orchid from me. I wonder if anyone will be brave enough to go all out for Bafana...or have we trod this tragic path too many times before?



Castle Lager's AI #TheBackUpSquad backs Bafana Bafana, rewards fans

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Loose lips

Some years ago, I did some freelance PR work on a major global marketing event and the South African-German CEO, an ex-military man, impressed upon me the critical importance of "controlling the message" when communicating anything about a brand.

A veteran of decades of corporate intrigue, he warned that opponents would jump on the slightest piece of loose communication and use it to beat you.

"Loose lips sink ships" as the British warning went during World War 2 about gossiping.



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That is why your spokespeople need to be not only well-versed with your brand and product, they need to stick to the

message and not get tempted to get emotional.

That is something which both of the major antagonists in our upcoming election, the ANC and the DA, would do well to learn.

At the risk of being accused of being a groupie of either one or the other, let me say I am looking at this from that “loose lips sink ships” marketing perspective.

Jester

ANC secretary-general Fikile “Mbaks” Mbalula has already established a hard-won reputation as a court jester, most of the time unwittingly. But, when he went public to say the ANC was tackling the various “challenges” in South Africa – as if the party were not responsible for all of them, from load shedding to pathetic service delivery – he left himself open to attack, which is exactly what happened on social media.

Apart from anything else, he looked arrogant as if believing his potential voters were stupid.

The same sort of arrogance overcame DA Leader John Steenhuisen, too, when he said Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi had recruited people for his crime wardens unit by dragging them out of shebeens and dressing them in “Pep Stores” uniforms.

Unsurprisingly – to everyone except Steenhuisen it seems – many Black people were offended. Some of the wardens were interviewed and said they were hurt by what he had said because they just wanted an honest job and to make a difference in their communities.

It is not great marketing, you DA leaders, if you insult the very potential voters – Black South Africans – whose votes you will need if you are ever to go further than just being an opposition party.

From a marketing perspective, both Mbalula and Steenhuisen are damaging the products they are trying to sell... and that is a shoo-in for an Onion for each of them.

ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

Brendan Seery has been in the news business for most of his life, covering coups, wars, famines - and some funny stories - across Africa. Brendan Seery's *Orchids and Onions* column ran each week in the *Saturday Star* in Johannesburg and the *Weekend Argus* in Cape Town.

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