

# The Vodacom relaunch - what an appalling waste

 By [Walter Pike](#)

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Once upon a time when I was the client services director at an ad agency in Cape Town I advised a client to reallocate the bulk of his advertising budget to solve the problem because as I said to him - "there is no advertising solution to this - we'll spend your ad budget next financial year".

Someone should have given the Vodacom marketing team similar advice.

Before I go on I must publically thank the Vodacom marketing team for paying my April account for me in recognition for being a "loyal" client for 17 years. I have to be quick because there are no terms and conditions and I have friends from Anchorage to Zurich to call.

We have all learned, or those who have done marketing that you don't mess with the brand, mostly changes to brands have been subtle and almost indiscernible. By brand here I mean that small portion of the brand, which is the device.

The logic is inescapable; every time I go to the supermarket I buy the brand in the blue box. If I get there this trip and there is no blue box I would need to know that the colour has changed to red or I would be completely lost, as a rote purchase of something which I buy without thinking you would be ill advised to make such a move.

Vodacom is not a shopping product. Vodacom has millions of customers, each of whom have made a significant investment even if only by getting their sim card through the RICA process. There are in other words some costs to switching and certainly contract customers are locked in. The point is that the change would have no effect whatsoever to my cell phone usage, the card is in my phone already.

Yes and there is something else reasonably significant about a cell phone. Yes you guessed it - it's a communications device, and everyone with a Vodacom cell phone is Vodacom customer so if you sent them all a message on their cell phone there is zero wastage, there is also very little marginal cost.

I suspect that Vodacom would have saved around R190 million of their R200 plus million budget had they sent an SMS or an MMS to each of their customers to inform them of the change - and imagine the delirium and positive buzz if they gave each customer say R150 free airtime. Would that cannibalise usage - I doubt it, it would be seen as a windfall and instantly used. A weeks TV and a few full pages in the Sunday press and some billboards (and other than the CI) the job is done.

This approach would also not have afforded Cell C the opportunity to "catch the wave", so to speak, with their campaign - recently banned by the ASA.

Oh, by the way, I am not going to call my friends in the Ukraine - I wouldn't abuse this trust - but seriously Vodacom, when someone is sent an official sms from you please make sure that your call centre can confirm it and don't make me wait for hours for an official confirmation.

## ABOUT WALTER PIKE

Walter has decades long experience in advertising, PR, digital marketing and social media both as a practitioner and as an academic. As a public speaker; Speaks on the future of advertising in the post - broadcast era. As an activist; works in an intersection of feminism & racism. He has devised an intervention in unpacking whiteness for white people. As an educator; upskilling programs in marketing comms, advertising & social in South, West and East Africa. Social crisis management consultant & educator. Ideaorg founder

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