

Use International Women's Day to enact real change, not simply sell products

By [Robyn Campbell](#)

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It's been very positive to see how, in recent years, global and local brands have embraced International Women's Day. But one must always beg the question - are they doing it for the right reasons, and are they prompting real action or simply showing face?



Robyn Campbell, MD of Machine_

International Women's Day offers brands the opportunity to join a movement to help empower and support women, and most importantly demand and affect change. So, changing one's colour theme or adding a celebration message to social media posts really doesn't cut it.

There's a very real risk that International Women's Day is on its way to becoming a commercialised event like Valentine's Day or Mother's Day. And as we all know, this goes against everything the day is there to commemorate.

International Women's Day should by no means be picked up as just another opportunity to sell or away for a brand to get attention, it should be driven by a brand's authentic desire to add value, and its part of our job as creative and strategic advisors to drive and nurture this thinking with our brand partners.



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So, what exactly should brands be doing to truly celebrate and add value to women on International Women's Day?

Here a few tips below:

1. Look at your own company before you say or share anything

Before jumping on the bandwagon and creating hype around International Women's Day, brands should look at their own businesses first, with a particular focus on their employment practices and how they engage with women via brand messaging.

Brands should ask themselves whether women are being recruited, promoted and retained in their businesses. Whether women get a voice in their organisation, if the organisation has built in equitable ways of working for mothers and whether they have tackled the gender pay gap issues that countless businesses still have.

And then just as important, a brand's next step should really be to look at how they engage with their female consumers. Are they given the respect they deserve? And are you recognising their influence on spending and product selection?

Whatever message a brand puts out there must be backed up by their own ethos and action, otherwise everything will fall very flat.

2. Link up with a fund or cause dedicated to advancing the prosperity of women

Many brands get creative in their celebration of International Women's Day, often shooting elaborate videos that celebrate women, but immediately lose their impact because the video doesn't have any action attached to it or link to any value adding element.

Everyone, and particularly brands who can really influence the masses, have a collective responsibility to make sure that women of all walks of life can live in a world where they are treated equally and have the opportunity to reach their full potential. But movements in this direction can only be credible and authentic when they have an action to back up the noise.

We know that it isn't within every brand's power to create their own fund or cause, so why not look to the many exceptional initiatives already active in South Africa. Our country is teeming with incredible organisations who work tirelessly to improve women's education and employment prospects, fight against gender-based violence and assist women with the skills they need to further themselves in business.

It is key, however, to the right cause or organisation that fits in with the brand's vision or intended goals, so the alignment doesn't come off as inauthentic.

3. Support a women's sports team or invest in a women-led business

Again, this is not necessarily something every brand can do but it is really important to realise that women entrepreneurs and sportswomen in South Africa are hugely under-funded and are so worthy of a helping hand from a brand who is really wanting to make a change in the lives of women in our country.

I suggest starting small with the likes of product donation, skills transfer or mentorship. Any action that has the ability to really add value goes a long way, big or small.

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