

Challenger Type - The Feisty Underdog

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The chicken that crossed the road and lived to tell the tale.

The journey of the feisty underdog is the classic David vs Goliath story, and *Chicken Licken* decided to take on that challenge almost 50 years ago.



Poultry is by far the most enjoyed type of meat by South Africans¹ and of the chickens supplied to the fast food industry in the country, around half are sold at KFC outlets². This number may have been higher for Colonel Sanders, if the now “*biggest non-American fried chicken franchise in the world*”³ had not been established: Chicken Licken.

Secret ingredient: Appetite for a fight

The most common of all Challengers is the Underdog. A brand that enters into a category and reduces the crowded competitive set by creating the emotional illusion that there are in fact only two brands in a category. What separates the Underdog from the Feisty Underdog, however, is their willingness to ruffle the feathers of the dominant, larger market leader.

This is a fight that Chicken Licken founder, George Sombonos, brought to KFC in the fast food, fried chicken category since day one. The Chicken Licken business was initially established in 1972 as Golden Fried Chicken, a year after KFC opened its first South African store in Orange Grove in 1971. Given the length of the original name, George decided he needed to change it to something that would fly. In 1982, after a suggestion from one of his waiters, the name changed to Chicken Licken.

The move would lead to his first court case against KFC, who claimed that the name was too close to their slogan, ‘Finger Lickin’ Good’. In a battle that almost bankrupted him, George went on to win the case against the American giant. Over the years, Chicken Licken would go on to trademark a whole range of assets, some of which are yet to be defended.

A unique taste: Local is lekker

The court was not the only place where Chicken Licken would pick a fight. Of particular note, was the opening of the first store in the ‘80s, in Soweto¹. Many of Chicken Licken’s stores were opened in the townships pre-and-post-1994, aiming to serve underserved Black communities and taking on the American giant who was seen to be addressing the more affluent market. This would endear Chicken Licken to many South Africans, amplifying the narrative of the smaller local player up against the dominant international brand.

South Africans are known to have some Underdog spirit themselves. Research shows that the more one self-identifies as an underdog, the stronger the narrative and connection with a brand.

Chicken Licken continuously fostered connections with their chosen audience. In the early ‘90s, they spotted an opportunity to partner with the late Joe Mafela, leveraging his role in the hit television show *Sgudi Snyasi* – from which the popular payoff line, ‘*It’s good, good, good, it’s good it’s nice (S’good, S’nice)*’, and meal options like *Joe’s Full House* and *Big Joe’s Licken Pie* were hatched.



Image: IOL

With the subsequent changes that have taken place in South African society since those early days, Chicken Licken's audience has broadened. The brand has key classic product names like the *Taxi 2* and *Hotwings* – the name which KFC attempted to buy around 1992. They have also introduced some new favourites such as #EasyBucks meals and #FeedMyCraving, which you can pick up at a FlyThru (drive through) near you. In addition to menu changes, Chicken Licken developed and evolved their communications to speak to their audience in a catchy, relevant way.

Ideas with legs: Poultry in motion

A key characteristic of the *Feisty Underdog* is the ability to create disproportionate noise for the size of their budget, relative to the category leader. This Challenger needs to be restless and noisy to stand out and Chicken Licken is just that.

Their communication is topical, relatable and entertaining. Be it: a take on Artificial Intelligence where [SBU 2.0](#) clones himself, the [Icelandic Boy](#) delivering a proudly South African feel, [Thato the Time Traveller](#) or the currently popular #EasyBucks series with a [dedicated page](#) on its interactive website. Challengers take their fight to all media and communication touchpoints, looking to maintain a connection to their audience at all times.





[Chicken Licken website](#)

In their latest communication, the brand takes a few digs at the competition and current circumstances while reflecting the spirit of South Africans as a soulful nation, emboldened by *Soul Food*.

Knocking out the stuffing

A total of 50 years on, *Chicken Licken* remains spicier than ever. Earlier this year, they took the challenge to the competition's backyard: [set in Kentucky USA](#), they interview residents about a recently erected billboard that advertises their low priced #EasyBucks offering. Later it is revealed that *Chicken Licken* won't actually be coming to town; residents

are visibly disappointed that they would have to travel to South Africa to get a taste. The clip ends with a local resident bemoaning: “You’ll never find a meal for that price in Kentucky.”

Whether it’s the affordable prices you’re after, the craving that’s got you or if you’re just looking to feed your soul, *Chicken Licken* has made itself a brand that is very hard to resist.

Sources:

1 TimesLive

2 Business

3 Chicken Licken platforms

Supporting facts and details taken from interviews with George Sombonos in Forbes Africa and Leader.co.za.

Overthrow II, by **eatbigfish.** and PHD, explores 10 of the most powerful strategies and mindsets used by today’s challengers to disrupt their markets. Get your copy of the book at [overthrow2.com](https://www.overthrow2.com). Find out what challenger type of Challenger you or your business is. Take the quiz: <https://www.overthrow2.com/challengertype/>
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Chicken Licken Twitter Page: 29.06.2020 showing KFC employees inside a Chicken Licken.

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If you would like to speak to someone please call or email our local representative for Africa Middle East: Delta Victor Bravo (Pty) Ltd

Contact David Blyth – david@eatbigfish.com

Telephone: +27 71 483 8514

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