

Shaking it up through marketing with a twist

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Have you ever experienced the discomfort of your freeloading guests spoiling your show? Perhaps you sent a video meant for 'bae' to your mom instead?

Or maybe you have those payday blues... Hey, at least you don't have to compete with a sociopathic intern!

These are just a few of the misadventures on the Aromat Comedy Club, a YouTube series created by Unilever, Oliver and the cream of South Africa's rising comedy stars.

Aromat is a well-known South African brand, 60 years after it first appeared in South African kitchens, and a shining star of Unilever's stable. But it doesn't coast on its past success. When research indicated Aromat lacked traction among millennials, Unilever turned to its on-site digital and creative agency, U-Studio - run by Oliver, to come up with an answer. What they created is the Aromat Comedy Club, which combines South Africa's upcoming comedy and influencer talents for a fresh image of Aromat.

Giving millennials a taste

"We know our audience is accessible online all the time-sharing, creating and engaging with rich content," said Thobeka Mkhize, Aromat brand lead at Unilever. "Specifically, our audience is engaging with online comedy skits, so it was a natural fit for the brand as well."

The campaign's first season features seven local comedians - Mzee Mbuli, George Mnguni, Siyabulela Deli, Siphelele Cele, Bridget Mahlangu, Fash Ngobese and Siviwe Lutseke. They were matched with themes chosen by the U-Studio team, touching on everyday scenarios that resonate with millennials.

Mzee's video is a funny take on ranting, where he plays a series of different characters sitting in the back of a rideshare car. Bridget created an elaborate episode where she and her mother had to speed-clean before an insufferable church gossip visited them. Siviwe sets up the worst blind date in history and George starts work as an intern only to get into a staff competition like no other!

"Everybody got a different topic for their skits," Mzee explained. "The one topic is ranting, and another is about spending money. These are general topics that South Africans would be experiencing, right?"

Creativity empowered by Oliver

U-Studio decided on the topic for each skit based on the thorough understanding of Aromat's market and the comedian's style. The shared goal was a well-produced YouTube series of skits that were funny, relatable and authentic. But there wasn't a necessity for micro-management from either the agency team or Unilever's brand team. The forged relationship of trust, a result of Oliver's model, was particularly useful for this campaign, as the comedians had considerable creative free reign, allowing their personalities to shine for Aromat.

This synergy is evident when viewing the various skit videos. Despite no mandate to put Aromat in the videos, the comedians found creative ways to include the brand.

"We wanted to use upcoming talents and give them a platform to grow and co-create with one another," explained Nkululeko Vilakazi, Oliver's conceptual copywriter for Aromat. "Our brief to the comedians wasn't to create an Aromat-centric skit but focus on interpreting the relatable topics. We are creating a platform for the comedians and helping them increase the production value of their skits."



A YouTube success

Did the campaign work for Aromat? The numbers reveal a growing sensation: the first season's videos have already gathered over 100,000 views each, and several are surpassing 200,000. The campaign shattered its subscriber growth and engagement benchmarks. It catapulted Aromat's YouTube channel as the biggest among the Unilever South Africa brands. There was also a marked rise in sales of the much-loved seasoning.

But the real success is not brand exposure. The Aromat Comedy Club is refreshing Aromat as a staple of South African life.

This was undoubtedly Mzee Mbuli's experience: "It's like noticing a new guy at work, and you realise he's not new. He's been there for years. Now that you've seen him, you literally see him every day. Aromat has always been in our homes, in our cupboards, wherever you go. Now, that red just pops out, and that yellow just pops up more. You see it with an eagle's eye. Even behind cupboard doors - you know the Aromat is there!"

The campaign's success is a combination of several factors. Unilever (which provides a creative space) could remain hands-off, relying on the trust built with Oliver's on-site marketing team.

The Aromat Comedy Club was an instant hit. It nails that crucial mark for advertising: marketing is not about branding or persuasion. It's about good content that resonates with an audience. By combining the creative talents of South Africa's comedians and Aromat's reputation for unbelievable taste, Unilever and Oliver's on-site team could shake things up with a new marketing twist.

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