

Standard Bank tries to do a Frankies

 By [Walter Pike](#)

24 Feb 2012

I was speaking at an event on Thursday afternoon, 23 February 2012, about the changing media landscape and the inability of companies to control the conversation, the need to listen and understand the discussion and what is happening in the community, and rather the need to facilitate the discussion. As I took my seat after handing over to the company spokesman, I checked my Twitter stream, as one does, and saw the start of the Standard Bank/FNB firestorm.



It was almost as if they had done it to help me make my point.

For those who missed it: at 4.38pm, Standard Bank [tweeted](#) that it had instructed "attorneys to lodge complaint with ASA against FNB for advertising that misleads the public". There were [several more tweets](#) on this [topic](#) before it announced at [6.08pm](#) that it would be on Radio 702 that evening to discuss why it had lodged a complaint at the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) against FNB regarding what it sees as misleading advertising. At 6.17pm, it [tweeted a link](#) to a blog post for more information.

Remember Frankies vs Woolworths?

Somewhere at the back of its mind, Standard Bank may well have thought how successful a similar sequence of events had worked out for [micro soft-drink manufacturer Frankies in its complaint against Woolworths](#) and tried to rally social media support behind them.

According to an analysis online reputation firm [BrandsEye](#) run for me late last night, the social networks lit up between 6pm and 10pm on this topic and, at the same time, increased the average discussion about banking hugely.

But it wasn't good for Standard Bank at all; in fact, in spite of the manner in which it presented its complaint as being in the interest of the consumer, the consumer - certainly those on the social networks - got a completely different message: that of a bank being so hurt by the opposition in a competitive sense that - and this is crucial - its only defence was to run and bleat "I'm going to tell on you", rather than sorting out its own service.

Clear victor

The clear victor in this conversation was FNB, with considerably more of the conversation with consumers actively engaging FNB with support, without Standard Bank. [@RBJacobs](#) actively engaged with the conversation 161 times, while [@StandardBankGrp](#) only 59.

In the process, Standard Bank has accidentally condensed a group against it and, without a coherent rallying point for Standard Bank, it is unlikely that it will assimilate that group. This has left FNB in a very strong position to build its brand.

There is no doubt that this debate will start up again on Friday and it will be very interesting to see where it goes and how the protagonists react. [@BrandsEye](#) will put this analysis into the cloud during the day and its [new crowdsourced](#) solution will kick back further insights, which I will report upon on ~~Monday 27 February~~ next week*.

During the day today, I will also be running a track of the community dynamics of the conversation, how the message is spreading and identifying the influential people in the conversation. Once again, I will report on that on Monday

Already lessons to learn

There are already lessons to learn:



Twitter avatar:
[@RbJacobs](#) at time of
publishing.



Twitter avatar:
[@MichaelJordaan](#) at time
of publishing.



Twitter avatar:
[@StandardBankGrp](#) at
time of publishing.

On the one hand, FNB's Twitter presence is [@RBJacobs](#) which, like its [radio spokesman Steve](#), is a fictional character, but which has developed a following by demonstrating a consistent and authentic ability to fix issues on behalf of its customers. It's run internally by a real staff member and engages, sometimes lightheartedly, with its community. There is also an FNB CEO presence in the form of [@MichaelJordaan](#).

Standard Bank's presence, on the other hand, is [@StandardBankGrp](#); its avatar is a logo; and it is run, the last I heard, by an external agency. Its tone is banking and guarded and corporately correct.

It is, in my opinion, impossible in anything but the medium term to manage a social media presence in an authentic manner unless it is authentically the voice of the company, so by definition this must be done internally.

The most important thing, though, is to be part of and to understand the conversation. In this case, FNB through [@RBJacobs](#) and [@MichaelJordaan](#) has engaged for long enough that people have begun to know them and, importantly,

to trust them; they feel like friends, and the community will always protect their friends.

Understand the community dynamics

If Standard Bank wish to recover, its vitally important then to understand the community dynamics and the roles played by individual members in that community. The discussion-starters and the answer-people, as well as the people who connect groups to each other.

The overall learning, though, is that when media ceases to be only a source of information and becomes a site of coordination, you lose control of your message. Your responsibility as a company is to understand this fact and work out how to operate in this world; the increasing number of South African examples of how corporates are getting this wrong should be a wakeup call to SA boardrooms.

We haven't even started talking about the parody accounts such as [@Steve_Beep_Bank](#) and [@BeepBank](#). They are also part of this discourse, and one of them seems to be pretty well-resourced. Hmm, I wonder if someone is trying to be too clever?

[Note: [@Steve_Beep_Bank](#) has been active since Wednesday 22 February and has been having a field day ever since with the national budget, Grant and Anele, the #bankwars and lots more. For what it's worth, I was assured via DM last night by [@Steve_Beep_Bank](#) that he/she/it is acting independently of FNB and its agencies (and [@BeepBank](#), which appeared in the middle of the #bankwars yesterday evening only) and that he/she/it had merely spotted the gap and decided to seize the opportunity and run with it as far as possible - managing ed.]

***Update at 1.58pm on 27 February 2012:** The BrandsEye data only came in at midday on Monday 27 February, so the analysis and writing up will take longer than expected.



Twitter avatar:
[@Steve_Beep_Bank](#) at
time of publishing.



Twitter avatar:
[@BeepBank](#) at time of
publishing, which is not
the version it launched
with last night, which was
much more recognisable
as being a blurred-out
Standard Bank logo.

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. Idearogy founder

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