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Australia bushfire crisis: why #ScottyFromMarketing is an insult to all marketers

By **Darren Woolley** - 13 January 2020 04:41am



The prime minister's own chosen nickname, ScoMo, quickly morphed into SmoKo, NoShow, and worse.

The fires this summer in Australia – many still burning – are tragic. The loss of life, property and native flora and fauna is immense. Words such as 'unprecedented' and 'catastrophic' somehow do not do justice to the disaster that continues to unfold.

As we all struggle to come to grips with what has happened – and is still happening – one of the issues that have been playing out in the media and online internationally is the perceived failure of Australian prime minister Scott Morrison to lead at a time of crisis.

There has been extensive criticism of his decision to go on a pre-planned family holiday to Hawaii as fires raged through the country. Reports of significant cuts to fire-fighting funding by the government and its ministers continued public rejection of the impact of man-made climate change, which has also inflamed public opinion against the prime minister.

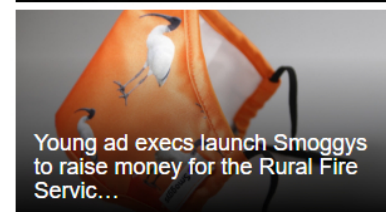
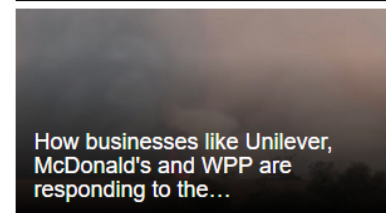
The prime minister's own chosen nickname, ScoMo, quickly morphed into SmoKo, NoShow, and worse. Most concerning for marketing professionals, however, is the **hashtag trending on social media** – #scottyfrommarketing – which is being used as a pejorative term, inextricably linked with his

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When I first saw #scottyfrommarketing online it made me laugh and I have to admit that I even used the hashtag on a couple of posts. The idea that the most senior politician in the country was being derogatorily compared to some wet-behind-the-ears kids in the marketing department is quite a compelling and humorous comparison.

But why is it so funny?

Morrison has clearly made what many see as missteps in his handling of the crisis, causing many to question his leadership ability. But what does this have to do with being a marketer, or even working in marketing?

A quick look at the [prime minister's Wikipedia page](#) or [LinkedIn profile](#) and there is nothing to suggest he is - or ever was - a professional marketer. He has a science degree in geographic economics. Although he is known in the industry for fiercely supporting the famous 'Where the bloody hell are you?' campaign as then managing director, he's no creative. His career roles and experience have been largely administrative and operational.

Disappointingly, the #scottyfrommarketing hashtag plays to the popular cultural stereotype of the marketer as self-obsessed, egotistical, lacking empathy and willing blatantly to misrepresent the truth to look good.

Everyone who works in marketing, media and advertising has seen these comedic parodies of the advertising and marketing professional in movies like Crazy People and What Women Want. It's grist for the mill. After all, advertising and marketing are renowned for leveraging stereotypes as a shorthand way to communicate, even when those stereotypes are irrelevant and demeaning.

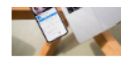
But Australia's Prime Minister is not a comic character, selected from Casting Central and performing to the creative whim of a screenwriter. Instead, the criticism points to his appalling failure of leadership and the belief that spinning the right story will make the whole situation right. The marketing function **has been long- and oft-derided** in business globally, with some CEOs and others referring to the marketing function as the 'colouring in department'. On the contrary, however, Morrison's response to the bushfire crisis is a disturbing example of poor ability. Poor advice. Poor execution. Dreadful marketing.

While it is true he had a clear objective (to shift the discussion away from Climate Change) and an important message to communicate (that he is here to support the State Government if only they would let him), and he has stuck to both religiously, he has clearly misunderstood his audience (the voting people of Australia) in his live appearances in the fire zones, through his media relations efforts, and his tactical advertising campaign, extolling his government's efforts.

You could argue that rather than #scottyfrommarketing, what Morrison needs is a damn good professional marketing practitioner to advise him before he, and his hashtag, do any more damage - not just to a profession struggling with its public perception, but far more importantly, to the office of Prime Minister during an unprecedented time of national tragedy and need.

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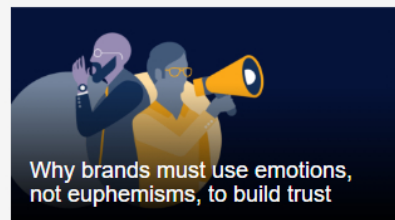
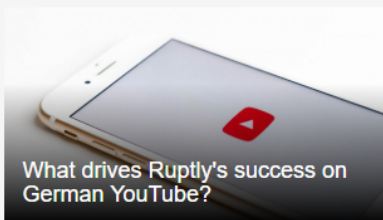
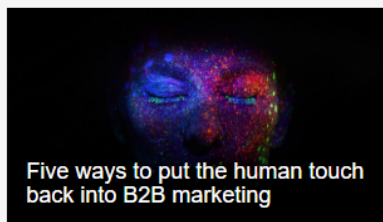
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