

Headline English

2012, week 3 *Learn English through reading on current world affairs*

1 **Insulting advertisements**

2 original at

3 <http://www.economist.com/node/21542210>

4 The list of people or groups an advertiser can be rude about is very short.
5 At the same time, the conventional wisdom is that if you don't want to
6 annoy anyone, you might as well give up.

7 Insulting dictators ought to be safe, so long as you do not operate in the
8 same country. Nando's, a South African restaurant chain, forgot that with
9 an ad showing a Robert Mugabe lookalike glumly alone at dinner (after
10 many of his fellow despots had been deposed). He reminisces about happy
11 days shooting water pistols with Muammar Qaddafi. The ad was broadcast
12 in South Africa, where Nando's middle-class target audience found it
13 hilarious. But Nando's also has restaurants in Zimbabwe. Threats ensued.
14 Fearing violence against its staff there, the ad was pulled.

15 In Australia Toyota had an ad that mocked both Range Rover and the
16 British queen: "Don't worry, Your Majesty. You're not the only British
17 export that's had its day." Monarchists howled, and Toyota had to
18 apologise.

19 Outside America, companies can probably get away with insulting George
20 Bush junior. In Malaysia, his face has been used to sell cars, contrasting
21 the "not smart" president with Smart cars. However, a Toyota ad
22 featuring Brad Pitt was banned there for being an "insult to Asians" by
23 promoting a Western ideal of male beauty. Indeed, the existence of Mr
24 Pitt is irritating to men everywhere.

25 It is often profitable to stir controversy. An ad that upsets people and
26 thereby generates headlines is an excellent source of free publicity. But if
27 it alienates potential customers, it has gone too far.

Questions

- 1) Does the article maintain that being impolite to certain people is something desirable in advertising?
- 2) Why was Nando's mocking of Mugabe problematic?
- 3) What does the adverb 'there' (line 14) refer to?
- 4) Explain the association of the British queen and the Range Rover.
- 5) In what way was president George Bush Jr. used as a symbol in advertising?
- 6) Why was the use of Brat Pitt as an icon not acceptable to Asians?
- 7) Many idiomatic expressions used to convey disagreement or agreement are scattered throughout the article. Find them!
- 8) What is the overall conclusion of the article?

Vocabulary

give up (line 6) – to stop doing, abandon, renounce (an activity, belief, etc)

ensue (line 13) – to follow; come next or afterwards, to follow or occur as a consequence; result

had its day (line 17) – to be past its prime, to be past its zenith, i.e. the time when a thing is at its best

get away with (line 19) – to not be caught or punished for something you have done or to be able to do something even though it is not the best thing to do

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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