# Nike faces backlash over London Marathon campaign for using "never again" phrase



Nike Faces Backlash Over London Marathon Campaign for Using "Never Again" Phrase

Nike's recent out-of-home (OOH) advertising campaign displayed during the London Marathon on Sunday has drawn criticism for its use of the phrase "never again," which some argue is inappropriate due to its association with Yom HaShoah — the Jewish Holocaust Memorial Day observed just days earlier.

The advertising campaign, part of Nike's broader "Winning Isn’t Comfortable" initiative launched in September 2024, featured billboards along the marathon route sporting slogans like “never again... until next year” and “never again, see you next year.” These taglines were intended to reflect common sentiments expressed by marathon runners upon completing the 26.2-mile race. The campaign has previously appeared at major running events worldwide, including the Chicago Marathon, Shanghai Marathon, and the Nike After Dark Tour in Sydney.

Critics highlighted that the phrase “never again” is deeply connected to Holocaust remembrance, as it has been a solemn refrain used for eight decades on Yom HaShoah, which occurs annually on the 27th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan (typically in April or May). Siena Dexter, co-founder and strategy director at Naked Ape, voiced her dismay on LinkedIn, asking, “Just tone deaf? Or f\*cking outrageous?” She emphasised the phrase’s historical significance by stating, “For anyone who somehow isn’t aware, it was Holocaust Memorial Day last week. The saying ‘never again’ has been repeated on this day for the last 80 years.”

However, several industry professionals offered dissenting opinions. Rebecca Holmes, creative strategy director at Cirkle PR, who identifies as a Jewish woman residing in the UK, expressed that she did not perceive the campaign as problematic and found the messaging “very relevant to marathon sentiment and discussion.” She communicated her views directly on LinkedIn, indicating that she believed the criticism to be misplaced.

Others shared similar perspectives. Joe Goulcher, creative director at Publicis-owned Boomerang, described the adverts as “clumsy and insensitive but certainly not a targeted statement.” Mike Bayfield, creative director at branding marketing agency Up There, Everywhere, suggested that the campaign's timing was unfortunate but rejected the notion of deliberate insensitivity, saying, “Ooops! Looks like just very bad timing. No brand would be so crass and stupid enough to try to leverage that. Would they?”

Conversely, Sajad Mahmood, co-founder at the Muslim-led marketing agency Manza, expressed scepticism regarding the campaign's oversight, remarking, “The level of sign-off and eyes on a campaign like this... Marathon runners do use the phrase but this is not a coincidence.”

A spokesperson for Nike issued a statement clarifying the context and intent behind the campaign: “We did not mean any harm and apologise for any we caused. The London billboards were part of a broader campaign titled Winning Isn’t Comfortable, built on runners’ insights and designed to motivate runners to push past what they think is possible. A series of billboards with taglines such as 'remember why you signed up for this,' ‘this is bloody tough’ and 'never again until next year’ were placed along the route to inspire runners, and the copy was based on common phrases used by runners.”

The campaign's juxtaposition with Yom HaShoah, a day dedicated to remembering the atrocities of the Holocaust, has given rise to the debate over the utilisation of language originally tied to profound historical pain in commercial and sporting contexts. The situation underlines the complexities brands face when balancing motivational messaging and cultural sensitivities. The story was reported by PRWeek UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/nike-pulls-nothing-beats-londoner-ads/1459767> - Nike withdrew its 'Nothing beats a Londoner' advertisements from YouTube following a legal challenge over the use of 'LDNR', highlighting the brand's sensitivity to cultural and legal considerations in its marketing campaigns.
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/rogue-advertisers-eye-city-marathon-1266037.html> - The Independent reported on Nike's unofficial advertising efforts during the London Marathon, including the use of bus-stop posters featuring a disabled competitor, illustrating Nike's history of ambush marketing strategies.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2020/sep/30/eliud-kipchoge-denies-platform-nike-shoes-offer-london-race-advantage> - An article from The Guardian discusses Eliud Kipchoge's use of Nike's Alphafly Next% shoes in the London Marathon, addressing debates over technological advancements in sports equipment and their impact on performance.
4. <https://www.france24.com/en/20201001-kosgei-chepngetich-to-use-controversial-shoes-in-london-marathon> - France 24 reports on Brigid Kosgei and Ruth Chepngetich's decision to use Nike's controversial shoes in the London Marathon, highlighting the ongoing discussions about the ethics of advanced sports technology.
5. <https://www.letsrun.com/forum/flat_read.php?page=5&thread=11902687> - A discussion on LetsRun.com where Sharron Davies leads a boycott of Nike, reflecting public reactions to the brand's marketing and product choices.
6. <https://www.letsrun.com/forum/flat_read.php?page=4&thread=11902687> - Continued discussions on LetsRun.com regarding Sharron Davies' boycott of Nike, providing insights into the broader community's sentiments towards the brand's actions.
7. <https://www.prweek.com/article/1915941/just-tone-deaf-%E2%80%93-nikes-london-marathon-campaign-backlash> - Please view link - unable to able to access data