

Setting the standard

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Blue and gold: Nothing tatty or condescending about this mag; Has good mix of corporate speak and stories about the common man...

PR and communication are a vital part of the marketing mix and the best brands realise this.

Marketing communication, however, is often directed at external parties and not the people within the organisation itself.

Internal communication is, for many companies, an unnecessary luxury. Yet, done well, it can be a financial “force multiplier” because it may help improve the morale of your workers, as well as showcase your brand to actual, or future, customers.

Bringing both the important strands together – of attractive writing and targeted communication – is seldom done properly in this country. Tatty newsletters seem to be the sum total of management’s concern about its internal reputation.

It was refreshing, then, to see a copy of Blue and Gold, the University of the Western Cape’s (UWC) sport magazine – the latest one honouring 60 outstanding athletes from its last 60 years.

It’s as slick and readable as any high-end magazine and serves multiple purpose: entertainment, education and information.

There are enough words from the important people in university management but there are plenty of articles about people and their achievements, written for people and not for those in charge of corporate speak.

Design is clean and no one who receives this free read should feel short-changed or patronised.

Blue and Gold passes the acid corporate comms/PR test: would it stand alone, in its own right, as a media product? The answer is a resounding yes.

It is a classic example of how internal communication should be done and, at the same time, showcases the best in PR writing.

No surprise, then, that at the helm is former newspaper editor Gasant Abarder.

He and a handful of others who have moved on from the media remain journo at heart. And it shows in what they produce.

Even in this high-tech world, communication specialists (PR spin doctors fall into this category) still need to do the basics like telling a compelling story.

Abarder and his team do this with flare. So an Orchid to him for showing how ethical PR writing can be carried out – and



for setting the standard for internal communications.

More than that, though, an Orchid to UWC for allowing him and his team to do what they do best.

There's a lesson there for other corporates in how to use PR and comms properly.

Hubris – and that's not the name of the rabbi at a Jewish ceremony – is something which plagues companies in the tech business particularly badly.

Even in a fast-moving world, we are flooded almost daily with the boasts that products are “unique”, “world-beating” or the peak of “innovation”.

But even by those nose-bleeding standards of corporate egotism, a recent marketing tweet by global telecoms company Ericsson stood out for its sheer inanity.

Speaking about the new 5G technology platform, Ericsson so very humbly proclaimed that “it's quite possibly the greatest innovation platform the world has ever seen”.

Even worse, though, was the text below an image, which said:

“We are creating something...”

Where to begin on the scale of bollocks? That's not easy ... but here goes.

Though you may have tried to damp down your hubris and overclaiming by using the word possibly, you are still telling the world that this technology is, what, better than fire (definitely a platform for millions of “innovations”); the wheel (ditto); powered land, sea and air transport (without which Ericsson execs wouldn't be able to travel to expensive global seminars for self-congratulation); or even the transistor or microchips (the actual technological giants on whose metaphorical shoulders 5G sits)?

Finally, please don't say “we're creating something” – which is, seemingly a reference to 5G – when you know very well that the Chinese (like Huawei) have a huge head start over you.

Ericsson, you get an Onion because such obvious oversell sends the wrong message about your brand.

It says to me you're arrogant, care little about actual facts and have a hugely inflated opinion of yourself.

None of those are things I would like to see in someone developing my new way of navigating my life.

ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

Brendan Seery has been in the news business for most of his life, covering coups, wars, famines - and some funny stories - across Africa. Brendan Seery's *Orchids and Onions* column ran each week in the *Saturday Star* in Johannesburg and the *Weekend Argus* in Cape Town.

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