

Taking a jab at Covid

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

19 Oct 2021

Coronavirus: Savanna, Checkers take clever advantage of pandemic; Risky undertaking pays big dividends in entertaining TV adverts...

It will always be a risky undertaking for an ad to acknowledge the effects of the coronavirus pandemic – so many things could be misinterpreted and there are plenty of reasons your brand could find itself in a public relations quagmire.

It was interesting, then, to see two TV ads flitting this week which do just that in incorporating the real news happening around us ... albeit they do it in different ways.

First up is Savanna Premium Cider, which has always positioned itself as the drink which loves having a bit of fun and doesn't take itself too seriously – basically what most people would like to do when going out with mates to have a bit of fun.

Naturally, that partying has been severely restricted since President Cyril Ramaphosa first put us into lockdown at the end of March last year.

Now that things are starting to ease up, party animal brands like Savanna can get back to having a bit of fun (although to

give them their due, they kept up the humorous ads during the darkest times of Covid).

The creative concept revolves around what the pandemic and the associated restrictions have done to the age-old game of dating. Singles, Savanna suggests, have been mouldering away at home, “growing their sweatpants and slipper collection”. As a consequence, they have “also let their umjolo (dating) game down”.

But it’s difficult to date and get to know others when you have to social distance and wear masks, never mind that awful curfew to dampen moods even further.

So, Savanna is offering up the services of Dr Loveback to guide the socially inept or rusty and help them find true love.

We see her trying to get her very awkward charges to “get with the programme” ... and there’s a giggle or two in that. Perhaps one of relief in that “hey, at least that’s not me” or maybe less certain “I’m not as bad as that...”

Oddly enough, I think we laugh with the people, rather than at them and that is a good thing because we don’t need any more gratuitous nastiness in world.

The ad pushes people to enter a competition to win R1m, which will help break the ice in any dating situation. Yet, at the same time, it reminds consumers that now we can start partying again, Savanna’s the cool way to go.

So, Orchids to Savanna and agency Grey/WPP Liquid, as well as Lazola Gola, director at 7Films.

One of the brands which does FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) marketing best is the Checkers group. They have to move products and so their pitches – whether in print, online or on electronic media – are always focused on a “call to action”, which is “buy this now and save money”.

To promote their special “Xtra Xtra” Weekend (this weekend) for their eight million-plus Xtra card holders, Checkers, through agency 99c and Platypus production house, came up with a striking TV ad, featuring the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra and a loud, pulsating black and orange theme.

When I asked the Checkers people why the orchestra had been used, their simple answer was heart-warming: the orchestra was “selected to appear in the commercial because the arts sector has been very hard hit by the pandemic”.

Not only is that a great gesture – in providing income and valuable exposure for the orchestra (which shows it is more than able of fitting into a funky musical theme) – but it fits in perfectly with the theme of the weekend: giving something back.

All in all, a great campaign, from a marketing as well as humanitarian perspective. Orchids to Checkers, 99c and Platypus.

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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