

Polished wit shines and gets headstart

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

13 Sep 2016

A colleague sent me this print ad for Nugget shoe polish, which appeared in one of the editions of the *Pretoria News* this week. I must say, it's simple and it's powerful and taps straight into the trending story of the moment, the hair revolt by the pupils at Pretoria High School for Girls.



A natural appearance looks just as polished.
#ProPro



The Onion-winning Nugget ad.

[click to enlarge](#)

It takes a sensitive topic and uses some of that subject's emotion and drive to promote its own product, but not in a way that is offensive. I think it took guts to do something like this because this is a touchy subject and virtually any remark on it can easily be misinterpreted one way or another, depending on your personal viewpoint.

But it is a perfect example of what I call news-vertising – using events in the news or which are being talked about to pull along your brand and project it into the public mind.

Also, the ad ran in the *Pretoria News*, the English newspaper in the city where it had all been happening.

Clever ad, clever media placement. So a double Orchid for Nugget.

I've often said brands need to be careful about the taglines they use.

Banks in particular can find themselves being bitten badly. Remember Simpler, Better, Faster – the slogan Standard Bank thought was so clever a few years ago? Problem: you heard it being said most often by irate customers standing

at the back of long queues in Standard Bank branches. Didn't take the bank long to drop that...

I have always wondered whether First National Bank walks the talk when it comes to its slogan "How can we help you?"

In my past encounters with FNB – admittedly some years ago – it almost veered towards the opposite.

I have been pleasantly surprised in the past few months in a couple of encounters with the staff at the FNB branch at Northcliff Corner.

They have not only helped me reactivate a near-dormant account, but have gone out of their way to add little extra touches – like witnessing documents and showing me how to make payments through an ATM, having first linked the target account to mine.

So, FNB, you – or more correctly, your staff at that branch – get an Orchid from me. Please don't let me down. (It's sad that I have to say that, but so often South African business backslides when it comes to customer service.)

Sometimes I wonder if Telkom has a marketing death wish. Even as its rivals are crawling all over our area, installing fibre networks promising real internet speed (Telkom itself is doing the same thing), its Webmail service slows to a crawl.

While I was looking at the offers from service provider MWeb, I was sitting looking at a blank screen as Telkomsa.net repeatedly refused to load and then reset the website connection.

However, I am not going to give Telkom an Onion for that, because if I did for every piece of less than optimal service its customers have had over the years, I would have no space left for other comments.

What did irritate me was MWeb's couldn't-care-less marketing.

We were not at home when the salesman called, so he shoved a document into our letterbox.

Nothing wrong there, but the paper had been photocopied so many times the text was at a skewed angle and the type was so faint I could hardly see what they were saying.

Am I not good enough for you to leave me a proper brochure? Or at least a legible, fresh photocopy? Perhaps I am therefore not good enough to do business with you.

When I see that sort of slapdash, rake-in-the-money-as-fast-as-possible attitude, I seriously wonder what will happen when there is a service problem.

Will you do a Telkom on me, MWeb? Onions for your attitude.

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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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