

Cross-cultural confusion makes a funny ad, PR confusion makes an unhappy editor...

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

3 Jul 2018

It doesn't take a lot to make South Africans angry... and facts, especially, are not needed when there is an angry argument to be made on social media.



Screengrab from the ad.

So, for example, there were those on Twitter last week bemoaning the fact that Africa had, again, not made it to the Last 16 of a World Cup. 'Must be racism', they cried.

Dear, oh dear.

With that in mind, and considering this angry divided country of ours today, it takes a brave company, or brand, to tackle some of our cultural issues in a roundabout, even humorous, way.

There is so much danger there in offending those who don't share your sense of humour. And those you offend are also

those who are unlikely to buy your product.

On the other hand, one thing we still do have as a nation is a collective sense of humour. And, we can – most of us anyway – still laugh at ourselves.

King Price Insurance has shown it is not afraid to use culture and humour... and it has done so effectively, because its advertisements often “go viral”, being spread around the internet.

The last one – of an Afrikaans-speaking *boer* who cuddles up to his farming equipment because the doctor suggested he do “sexy things to a tractor...” – went far and wide.



#OrchidsandOnions: Getting lost in translation is one thing, but using someone else's incorrect, and dangerous, garbage is something totally different

Brendan Seery 24 Apr 2018



The follow-up is already popping up on social media and being forwarded by email and now King Price have aired it on TV, too, so it's bound to get a lot of eyeballs. And, I think, also chuckles.

We see a well-dressed Cherman trundling through the countryside to the love of his life, Thandi. She greets him rapturously at the door to the family home and our intrepid suitor beams in a way most of his countrymen would have been doing, had they stayed in the World Cup.

Then, Thandi's stern-faced father appears at the door. Don't worry, says the earnest young Teuton, I have come to declare my “luff” for your daughter. I want to marry her and I have brought the lobola. He produces a box containing a kettle, and then, beaming, points out that the father wanted “50 kettles” as lobola for Thandi ... and there they all are in the back of the bakkie.

Fifty kettles? That's probably what the father said, and what the German heard. Cultural misunderstanding... cattle, not kettles, is what the old man wants.

It's a typical South African, not-listening, talking-past-each-other, moment. But it's funny and it has a simple innocence about it.

Still, it could offend somebody in this easily-offended world of ours. But the humour and the bravery are what make this advertisement stand out. So another Orchid to King Price.

There is nothing guaranteed to rile an egotistical journalist more than getting his or her name wrong than to waste their time, or clutter up their e-mail and voicemail inboxes, with totally inappropriate press releases.

Public relations rule number one: understand your target market. Do not send someone like me (who writes about media and cars and runs a news operation) material more suitable for an engineering or fashion magazine. Yet, that is what happened recently.

First up was a release from Paddington Station PR agency about “Beetroot Inc” and its “beautiful lifestyle furniture and home décor items”.

With tears in my eyes, people, NO! I am not interested in your scatter cushions. Why are you sending this to me and not to the appropriate person? By addressing me by name, at the correct address, you must surely have my title? That being the case, do you think I am the Interior Decor Correspondent? Remember, you want my publication to give your clients publicity and you expect me to correct your lack of professionalism? I don’t think so.

Onion to Paddington Station.

Next was a release from Gugulethu Ndlovu at nGage, addressed to me personally, not just some arbitrary “editor”.

It started:

“ The complex core geometry at the Katherine Towers project in Sandton sawPERI South Africa deploy its RCS-CL (Rail Climbing System Carriage Light) to reduce crane time and maximise platform sizes for the complex core geometry. Please find attached a press release detailing the complete solution supplied to realise this challenging and intricate structure. ”

Do I look like I edit *Engineering News? Architectural Digest? Big Cranes Weekly?* More bad PR. Another Onion. Do some research please, nGage...

And this tailpiece is not really an Onion, just a reflection on perhaps the most bizarre “house advertisement” in the history of newspapers in this country.



This advertisement appeared in *Afro Voice* newspaper on Friday championing Afrotone Holdings, the vehicle businessman Mzwanele Manyi used to buy the Guptas' media interests, including the TV channel formerly known as ANN7 and now as Afro Worldview and the newspaper formerly called The New Age.

Quite ironic to be boasting about having 500 employees when, for many of them it would be their last day, as the newspaper closed down on Friday.

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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