

Two Onions for Woolworths

By  [Brendan Seery](#)

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And two Onions for the tacky Vodacom/Showmax ad - at least Toyota's latest TV ad for its Hilux team deserves a plump Orchid...



Screen grab from the Orchid-worthy ad.

Given that it's the marketing and brand image issue much of the country has been talking about this past week, I have to start off with the Onion section of this column – because the award goes to Woolworths.

Actually, it's two Onions: The first, for marketing arrogance (or stupidity, or both). The second for Woolworths' apparently less-than-moral corporate culture.

Both of these can do serious damage to any brand.



Woolworths, Ubuntu Baba saga contains digital lessons for brands of all sizes

Vumani Ncube 10 Jan 2019



But even more so, this is true for a company which has set itself up on the suburban moral high ground with its apparent “holier than thou” retailing, designed to appeal specifically to rich people with a conscience.

The issue is that of how Woolworths apparently copied large chunks of the design of a baby carrier first sold by uBuntu Baba, a Cape Town small enterprise.

When the owner saw the Woollies knock-ups for sale at much cheaper prices (because they're made in China) she tried to contact them. Repeatedly. But with no success.

So she took to social media, from where the story was picked up by other media... And then Woolworths took notice.

But its half-hearted "apology" did nothing to assuage the common feeling that they are scam artists. Two copies of uBuntu Baba's product were indeed bought by its staffers, said Woolworths, but these were pregnant women.

They said, in their official statement:

“ While there are differences in our baby carrier, there are striking similarities which we acknowledge and take responsibility for. This is not in line with our values and goes against the very clear policy and creative guidelines we have in place for our design process. This lapse in process is being addressed internally. We are intensifying and strengthening the training of our people, our suppliers and partners on our values-based approach to the design and sourcing process. ”

So, there you have it. Theft, redefined as "a lapse in process".



Lessons from the Woolies crises

Chris Mberdyk 22 Oct 2013



Coming as it did after other plagiarism cases (including that of Frankie's soft drinks a few years ago), one could not escape the feeling that Woolworths is not only a serial offender in this area, but that this is also seemingly tacitly permitted by management.

I still do not know what the final result will be. Woolworths has withdrawn the product and said it will reimburse those customers who bought it.

But, at the time we went to print, there was no talk of paying royalties to uBuntu Baba.

The real reputation management issue for Woolworths – which it handled badly – is that while customers are prepared to pay a bit more buying from an ethical company, by the same token, those very same people will also be prepared to make a statement of conscience by boycotting your stores.



Woolworths apologises for copycat Ubuntu Baba carrier

9 Jan 2019



It will be interesting to see what happens...

While on the subject of tacky, I think the Vodacom/Showmax ad flighting at the moment – which many people think is cute (those who love lavatory-type humour, I would guess) – confirms the creative world truism that when you're out of ideas,

switch to crudity.

So, we see a “couldn’t-care-less” call-centre employee rampaging through the office because he is more focused on his free Showmax shows, courtesy of extra data from Vodacom.

He clearly doesn’t give a.... And the ad goes there: “Zero Buck Given”. Ha, ha, ha everybody. Primary school level of humour.

I suppose if you’re a cellphone network ridden with customer complaints, and a pay-TV offering getting eclipsed by Netflix, you have to do something. But it doesn’t help either of your brands. So you both get an Onion.

For a change, the pleasant bit of the column is at the end.

Toyota’s latest TV ad is for its Hilux team, which is doing very well in the gruelling Dakar Rally.

Although the main man, Giniel De Villers, has slipped down the field a bit (not least because he stopped to help a teammate – the South African and the Hilux way, I suppose), both he and the team (which is local) are doing us proud as a nation, at a time when we sorely need to hear about uplifting things.

The ad pulls in a family of meerkats – also famous personalities, through various documentaries and ads – to remind everyone of the “Hilux nod” – the movement the head makes in sympathy with the hard-charging Hilux crews as they fly over sand dunes.

Who doesn’t love a meerkat? And from that, I suppose the next logical questions are: Who doesn’t love Giniel? And, who doesn’t love Toyota? Given the popularity of the brand in SA, it’s a fair thought to have.



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Leigh Andrews 15 Dec 2017



The ad is simple, it focuses people on the brand and the event – at which the brand gets even more exposure – and it is flavoured with cute.

So an Orchid for Toyota and for its long-standing ad agency, FCB Joburg.

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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