

Secrets we don't talk about, but should

By  [Brendan Seery](#)

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Orchids to Nedbank for deciding to do a positive thing and get people thinking, while Rosebank Day Spa gets an Onion for a lost opportunity.



Screen grab from Nedbank's *Secrets*.

You know a marketing campaign is hitting the spot when people are not just talking about it, they're thinking deeply about its content. And I think that is what is happening around the country with Nedbank's massive, and brave, *Secrets* movie project.

I had heard a few things in passing here and there (not wonderful PR for such a ground-breaking idea, though) about *Secrets*, but it was my colleague Thami Kwazi, our lifestyle editor, who told me about one particular episode – Amanda's story – and how it was so spot-on about how many South Africans are living today.

The aim of this story – and the campaign – is to highlight how three out of five South Africans live well beyond their means and spend more than they earn.

Kwazi said she knows so many ‘Amandas’ out there – often young, upwardly mobile black people – who just spend, spend, spend and think nothing of tomorrow or the consequences.

In the episode, we see Amanda’s life gradually unravelling before her (and our) eyes as she falls into a pit of despair, triggered by her addiction to money, in much the same way as an alcoholic spirals downwards, losing everything, from career, to family and even a place to live, on the way down. Easy credit, easy money – that’s what fuels Amanda’s addiction.

And, like many South Africans in a similar position, she doesn’t want to acknowledge what is going on; doesn’t want to talk about it.

“ *In the rationale for the campaign, Nedbank and creative agency Joe Public determined that South Africans would rather talk about their weight than their bank balance. And those sort of conversations are what is needed.* ”

The debt trap knows no race, no gender, or professional status. So many get caught.

I must say, it does strike you first as a bit counter-intuitive for a bank, which makes its billions off people who often don’t manage their money properly – and who have fuelled the credit boom in recent years – to be saying “hold on!”

But, it actually does make sense. Nedbank’s view is that it would rather have customers spending less on credit, but keeping solvent – and returning to use the bank’s services over a longer period – than to fight the defaulters and try to recover a few cents on the rand owed.

So, Orchids to Nedbank for deciding to do a positive thing and get people thinking, and talking, about how to manage money.

My wife teaches the much-maligned (by the clevers like Professor Jonathan Jansen) maths literacy curriculum... and her pupils are learning how not to end up being just “another Amanda”. It’s gratifying to see a big corporate also getting involved in vital education.

An Orchid, too, to Joe Public, for the creative vision to bring Nedbank’s commitment to life.

Of course, great ideas come to nothing unless they can be visualised and then made real for an audience, and that’s why one of the best local ad directors, Greg Gray of Romance Films, was brought in. He and his team produced a fine movie. It’s not the sort of thing you’ll see at the Oscars, so the team will have to be satisfied with Orchids from me.



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One of the best things about the internet – and specifically, online shopping – is that it enables lazy or forgetful men not to be caught out on the cusp of an important anniversary or birthday, because a last-minute gift voucher can be produced in a digital flash and a blur.

So, I was feeling pretty pleased with myself for using that particular relationship get-out-of-jail-card for my wife’s birthday.

She always puts everyone ahead of herself and deserves some pampering, so I got her vouchers for the Rosebank Day Spa.

I chose what I wanted, entered her name and email address as the recipient and told her not to open her email until her birthday.

So far, so good. She still has to book to go for the treatment she wants and the money has already been debited to my credit card.

That, however, didn’t stop Rosebank Day Spa sending me an email, thanking me for my “visit” and asking how I experienced the facilities. It was not referring to the website, but to the spa itself.

This is How Not To Do Digital Customer Relationship Management 101.

Firstly, Rosebank Day Spa, the team of internet clevers who designed the back end of your e-commerce system failed to put in anything which distinguishes between the person who pays for the voucher and the person who actually uses it.

Secondly, there is no system to determine whether the voucher holder has actually redeemed it.

“ To get silly messages like this shows the designers of the e-commerce system don’t know what they’re doing.

However, someone in the business has signed off on it, which indicates he or she doesn’t understand, either. ”

So, Rosebank Day Spa, you get an Onion for a lost opportunity. Makes me wonder what the place will actually be like when my wife goes there...

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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