

# MSF campaign is just the medicine

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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And a big Onion for the Gauteng provincial traffic department's pointless press release, with a promotion for a Women's Day event on August 9 attached to an email sent out in September.



Screen grabs from the ad campaign.

Too many young people these days view medicine as a career – and a lucrative one, at that.

Granted, getting a medical doctorate is not easy but, once obtained, a very tidy living indeed can be made in private practice.

(That may be a generalisation, but after just paying in R18,000 for a comparatively minor surgical procedure, because medical aid rates are far below specialist and hospital charges, I am a wee bit cynical about some in the medical profession. I don't know if it's going to be any better under National Health Insurance, but you can't fault the principle behind it.)

Every now and again, you are reminded that there are people who went into medicine to help their fellow human beings.

And Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is just such an organisation. In English, it is known as Doctors Without Borders – surely one of the most apt organisational names of modern times.



## Fresh new ad campaign for Doctors Without Borders lets actions speak through clever wordplay

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These are the medical professionals who volunteer to go to the places few others would want to – an ebola treatment centre, or a tiny rural hospital in the middle of a war zone. And they don't do it for money or for adulation. They do it because it is, in their view, the right thing to do.

*“ That image of MSF's personnel – helping the helpless under the most arduous or dangerous conditions – is something almost ingrained into my consciousness. ”*

So, I was really surprised – thanks to a new campaign for the organisation – to find that they also operate in South Africa. Clearly, our government health services are inadequate in many instances, so any help is to be welcomed.

MSF has a number of projects in South Africa, ranging from HIV treatment and counselling to treatment of extreme drug-resistant tuberculosis and helping the victims of sexual assaults.

And, like any humanitarian non-governmental organisation, they're looking for financial help.

Grid agency has put together a multichannel campaign for Doctors Without Borders, which focuses on word play that you might see in a game of Scrabble. When letters are replaced, a potentially grim message is turned into one of hope.

*“ It's simple, as are the visuals in both the print and video executions. And simple it is to make a donation. It doesn't have to be a huge amount, either. But it will make a difference. And, with an organisation which has such an unimpeachable reputation, you have no worries about your money not being utilised correctly. ”*

Although the ad is aimed at raising donations, I think it should be required viewing for those thinking about a career in medicine, those studying or those newly qualified... simply as a reminder that life is about more than money.

So, Orchids to Doctors Without Borders and to Grid.

Today's free public relation lesson is: if you don't have anything to say, don't say it.

And it comes courtesy of the Gauteng provincial traffic department and its rather verbose spokesperson, Ofentse Morwane.

Morwane was called into action this week to tell his captive audience (all those served by government departments are captives) of the wonderful job being done by the provincial traffic cops.

*“ Did they stop taxis driving illegally? Did they seize unroadworthy vehicles? Did they stop overloaded trucks? You guessed correctly – none of the above. ”*

They caught two people for speeding.

Admittedly, they were travelling at high speeds – just on 180km/h – but as the sum total of provincial cop action that week, it was pathetic.

That should be part of the normal daily achievements of such an organisation, and not trumpeted in a 300-word press release.

In addition, Morwane spluttered on and on about how motorists should take responsibility. Yeah, yeah, yeah. If hot air worked, we wouldn't have close to 20,000 people a year dying on South African roads.

If you are going to do PR – especially for government departments, which are just basically sheltered employment operations – then get out there and find some real good news stories to tell.

And lose the inflated sense of importance, Mr Morwane – that will always get you an Onion.



And you can have an additional one for not checking your release was sent out by a staffer. Perhaps you might have noticed that having a promotion for a Women's Day event on 9 August attached to an email sent out in September just makes you look like you don't give a damn.

## 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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