

# Two sides of lockdown ads

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

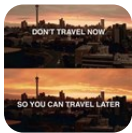
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As we move through the extended lockdown - with the worrying prospect of further extensions - it will be interesting to see how fresh and appealing those ads by companies proclaiming a new-found patriotism and a "hold hands and sing kumbaya" unity will be...

In the first three weeks, it was all a bit of a novelty, a bit like 1994 and World Cup 2010 rides again. But as time drags on and as people begin questioning out loud whether the cure of lockdowns might be more deadly than the original disease, such ads are going to become increasingly tiresome, I would guess.

Despite that, though, and despite the fact there is a cloying sameness about many of the ads currently fighting, there are still some out there worth noting.

One which did grab my attention, because it was the second produced in the series, is for SA Tourism (SAT), again urging people not to travel now so that they can travel later.



## #OrchidsandOnions: Unity against Covid-19

Brendan Seery 31 Mar 2020



SAT was one of the first brands out of the blocks with a Covid-19 ad, fighting it within 48 hours after the lockdown started. That's quite an achievement, considering they didn't involve an agency and did it in-house.

The new ad focuses on South Africa's sports fanaticism – which is on hold – to make the point that, just as all team sports feature people working together and just as national sporting teams have a duty to uphold the honour of the country so, too, can the population at large work together for the greater good and so, too, can they get their 'national call-up' in an hour of need. That call-up is to obey the rules and stay at home.

This time, the ad doesn't feature, other than in passing, the various beautiful vistas of country that the first ad did. Yet, it still does remind us that like the sports activities and celebrations we have almost forgotten about and which will eventually resume, our country is still there waiting for us to explore.

So, the ad does double duty as a national public service announcement, as well as a reminder of the SA Tourism brand. And it deserves an Orchid from me.

Less praiseworthy is an ad flitting at the moment for MTN and which the company calls 'Mathata Towers'... and then tries to pass off as a national appeal to solidarity during the coronavirus lockdown.

While I am all for recycling and repurposing, this doesn't extend to creative work like this. The ad was clearly shot during the peak of load shedding. It features a block of flats where everybody, clearly, is getting by, in the dark, with the help of MTN.

Fair enough. But the first point is that we don't have load shedding at the moment – so this ad is blatantly irrelevant. It is also obvious that it has been hastily repurposed. Hence the words 'We're in this together' flash across the screen, before the newly amended MTN slogan, which is now 'Everywhere you stay' (from 'Everywhere you go').

This is advertising cynicism at its worst. Not only that, it took almost 10 days after the start of lockdown to get all this together. So, an Onion for MTN and its agency, TBWA. If you can't do something fresh, don't do anything at all.

## 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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