

Optimism wins the day

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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One of the things which has gone into self-isolation in the past few months is optimism. Along with its sibling, confidence, it's what our country needs now as we battle the coronavirus and the carnage it has wrought on our economy.

Neither are traits you see often in business people... but Marcel von Aulock, chief executive of Tsogo Sun, is one top businessman bucking the trend. He's either very brave or exceedingly foolish. But he is sending out the right messages and vibes as he and his group get ready for a return to business.

This week, he announced Tsogo would be taking over three iconic hotels from Marriott International – which Marriott had said it would have to close. These are the Mount Grace in Magaliesburg, the Edward in Durban and the Protea Hotel Hazyview in Mpumalanga.

“ Tsogo Sun Hotels to take over Mount Grace, The Edward and Protea Hotel Hazyview. Click <https://t.co/YQ2dE0ac7E> for more info. pic.twitter.com/pd8Da5HBad— Tsogo Sun (@tsogosun) [June 20, 2020](#) ”

Now that the government has announced casinos, restaurants and theatres can reopen, Tsogo's Gaming division already had an upbeat “back to normal” TV commercial prepared which, like Von Aulock, is optimistic... but realistic at the same time.

The ad is shot in and around the MonteCasino precinct in Joburg and it shows the echoing empty casino floor, devoid of gamblers and populated only by silent slot machines. Then we see scenes of the slots and the tables back in operation.

Over the visuals are the messages: “We have to open”, “We have to entertain” and then “It's what we do”.

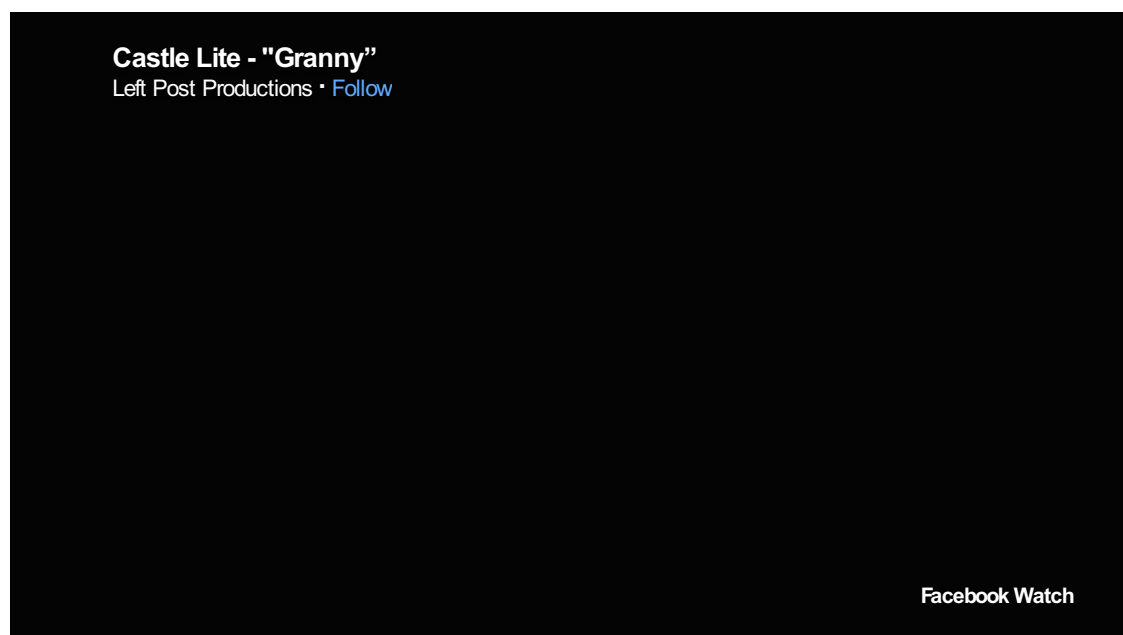
It's simple but it's effective in passing along a “call to action message” (so patrons will know it's gambling as usual), but also as subtle brand building, because it shows Tsogo Gaming as having confidence... and confidence and optimism can be as contagious as the virus.

In that sense, the ad also performs the work of a responsible corporate citizen: we know it's tough, but we want to get back to work. And getting back to work is what will help us stagger back from the brink. So, an Orchid to Tsogo Gaming and another to Von Aulock, because plenty of other CEOs can learn from the way he communicates.

In my youth, when I was a beer drinker (I much prefer red wine these days), I would have run a mile if my favourite brand

had tried to pitch its product at me using my grandmother.

So I do have to wonder about the rationale behind the latest ad for Castle Lite (which, in any event, only has a nodding acquaintance to real beer) – which features a gogo who looks remarkably like Helen Zille.



That was probably what got my attention – but the fact that when this old dear arrives home, she puts a record on the record player (don't know what that is? Ask your gran) and then pulls out a Castle Lite and twists off the cap. Then she proceeds, one assumes, to get blasted.

The message is supposed to be one that encourages safe drinking and socialising in the midst of a pandemic: so stay at home and get mellow.

Perhaps there was some “clever” who reasoned that “doing something different will get people to pay attention, dude...” but beer marketing has always been about marketing a lifestyle. Even though we know lots of different people consume it, it's aimed at attracting the “cool”, younger crowd, or those who hanker after their youth.

Maybe that latter target audience was what the makers of the ad had in mind. But you clearly don't understand the mindset of the largely male, young audience which drinks Castle Lite.

Who wants to drink a beer knowing that your mates at the pub will say something like: “Well it's good enough for your granny, so it's good enough for you” – as they reach for a rival ale. Maybe drinking Castle Lite does destroy your creative braincells ...

You get an Onion, Castle Lite. Even your granny would understand that.

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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