

No 'hairy' service fees

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Humour: VW's funny advert is a sign we're getting back to normal; Close shave has cost plumbing franchise Brendan Seery's business, though it's not due an Onion, yet...

As we start to slowly get back to normal – actually, sometimes I wonder whether that's achievable, given the economic devastation of Covid-19 – it's encouraging to see the ads about the 'normal' things in life.

Many have had to be put on the back burner during the lockdown but are now back in our lives. A 'normal' thing which often frustrates, worries, or even scares many people, is owning a car.

It may be an ego-booster, but it can be an enormous hassle, especially if you have to take care of all the little details yourself. So car owners are looking for as little stress in their lives as possible.

That's the promise Volkswagen and its ad agency, Ogilvy Cape Town, have been making lately in their series of commercials pushing the idea of the carmaker's Easy Drive vehicle plans.

These cover basic warranties to service plans (included in the cost of most of their new cars) to comprehensive maintenance plans, which promise seamless mobility.

Service and maintenance plans were originally introduced as a way to reassure customers that they wouldn't get the traditional 'garage bill heart attack' when putting in their car for scheduled servicing.

Of course, the costs are incorporated into what you pay for the car, so there is no real saving, but people still feel as though they are getting something for free.

Increasingly, as modern life keeps piling on the pressures – especially on young people – vehicle plans like Easy Drive are appealing because they offer less hassle.

And that's the basic truth Ogilvy Cape Town seeks to capture in the ads: if only the rest of my life was as easy as ensuring my VW is maintained and serviced.



The latest execution features a young, upwardly mobile woman getting her hair done. She is forced to confess to the hairdresser from hell that, yes, she did stray by letting someone else loose on her hair. Only because, she pleads, it was “my sister’s birthday and you weren’t available..”

The miffed stylist twists a deadly looking comb into the hair, muttering “It’s fine...” But you know it’s not as the other customers and the other hairdresser show their shock that the woman could so tempt fate by angering the prima donna stylist.

Then comes the punchline that if only getting my hair done was as easy as Easy Drive.

It’s nice to see a bit of humour creeping back into our advertising and, in this case, to see it being used to complement a clear sales pitch. So Orchids to VW and Ogilvy Cape Town.

Brand image is something which can take years to build, but can be destroyed in seconds by thoughtless behaviour by an employee.

That’s why the offence of ‘bring the company into disrepute’ is such a serious one and why so many employees have found themselves on the street after being found guilty of it.

Many companies and brands are also zealously protective of their corporate image and will go to great lengths to protect it, even to court to warn off usurpers.

Yet, surprisingly, many companies don’t seem to realise how damaging the behaviour of their drivers in company-branded vehicles can be.

While what follows is a personal anecdote, it has a lesson for companies which do not put in place strict rules about behaviour in public places while on duty.

The other day, while out walking, my wife and I saw a small bakkie belonging to a well-known national plumbing and electrical franchise business, deliberately accelerate across an intersection against a red light. When I shouted at the driver – because this gets people killed – he shouted back: “F**k off!”

He seemed to care as little for the rules of the road as he did for the fact that it was obvious which company he worked for and that his registration plate was clearly visible.

As a potential customer (they have a franchise in our area), I would think twice about calling them out to fix a problem in my

house. If they employ criminals like this (breaking traffic laws as well as swearing in public, which is crimen injuria), what guarantee do I have that my house and its valuables are safe when people like this on are on the premises?

I did report the incident and was assured by the company that they would be taking action, although they have yet to report back on that.

However, I will give them the benefit of the doubt and will not, therefore, be awarding them an Onion. But I will never use their services – and so, effectively, their employee has cost them business. And that is bad marketing.

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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