

# A human look at Covid

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

8 Sep 2020

Thinking about insurance: clever concept of 'rebooting' 2020; Simple aspirations of people who have seen the world turned upside down...

One of the interesting aspects of the lockdown has been the way it has seen companies trying to change their messaging, to emphasise how “human” they are, how they are “always there for you” and that “we’re all in this together”.

Most of it takes a back seat to making a buck. No clearer example is there than that of Santam and other short-term insurers, which are in court fighting to avoid paying out policyholders for business interruption losses suffered due to lockdown.

Momentum is another insurer which didn’t cover itself in sympathy after it also fought to avoid paying out life insurance to a widow whose husband died in a hijacking – because he failed to declare a medical problem. Eventually, when someone woke up to the reputational damage this was doing, the company paid out.

Their latest TV ad, which has been around a month or two, is a more human and optimistic look at Covid-19 and its aftermath.

The campaign revolves around the clever concept of 'rebooting' 2020, the year most of us would rather forget. In tech-speak, let's think about the new version of this particular programme, 2020 2.0.

The ad shows people (and a cute dog) thinking about what they're going to do once things are back to normal. For an older couple, it's to "love each other even more"; for a disabled guitarist in a wheelchair, it's to "be so loud, the world is going to hear"; for another woman, it's to "give nature a lekker big hug"; while the dog promises to "chase more cats"; and a young boy promises to throw away the masks he hides behind and is "not going to be scared any more".

These are the sort of simple aspirations of ordinary people who have seen the world turned upside down over the past six months and who realise there is the opportunity for approaching life differently.

Version 2.0 of 2020 does sound appealing, although there is no hard sell for Momentum. The read-between-the-lines message from the insurer is that it's time for a change and the future has to look, and actually be, better.

Of course, when you're thinking about the future, you've got to be thinking about insurance...

So, an Orchid to Momentum.

Many companies have gone completely over to social media as a communications channel for customer service. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

Clearly, in the case where conventional complaints mechanisms don't work, Twitter or Facebook are good options for aggrieved consumers because the dirty linen gets aired in public.

Our government and municipal departments have a well-deserved reputation for almost non-existent customer service when it comes to complaints.

I was surprised this week to see a number of complaints on social media about the SA Revenue Service (Sars), with people saying they had tried phoning and sending e-mails with no result. Suddenly, though, when they used Twitter, up popped a Sars social media person, promising to get something done.

This week, for at least the 10th time this year, our garbage was not collected by Pikitup, the Johannesburg refuse service which would be more aptly named "Leave it Behind".

Since phoning the municipal call centre is the quickest way to madness, I decided to use social media and send a direct message to Pikitup on Twitter. Hours later, when I had got no acknowledgement, I went public, so every who follows me could see.

Then I got a response – with a request that I supply address details.

When I tried to do so, however, I discovered that Pikitup's Twitter setting does not allow you to reply. Shortly after that realisation, the whole response from them disappeared – deleted by them, obviously.

One doesn't expect much from our municipal departments but I was especially irked because Pikitup was, on its Twitter timeline, extolling the virtues of paying your rates and taxes ... so you can get those wonderful services.

Fortunately for those fat cat civil servants in Pikitup, they are almost wholly unaccountable to us, the ratepayers, and not held to any performance standards.

Still, if you decide to use social media to communicate with your customers and you do so in an arrogant, incompetent way, then you're doing dreadful marketing.

And that will get you an Onion.

I would ask you to collect it, but on your track record, I know I'll be waiting a long time...

## 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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