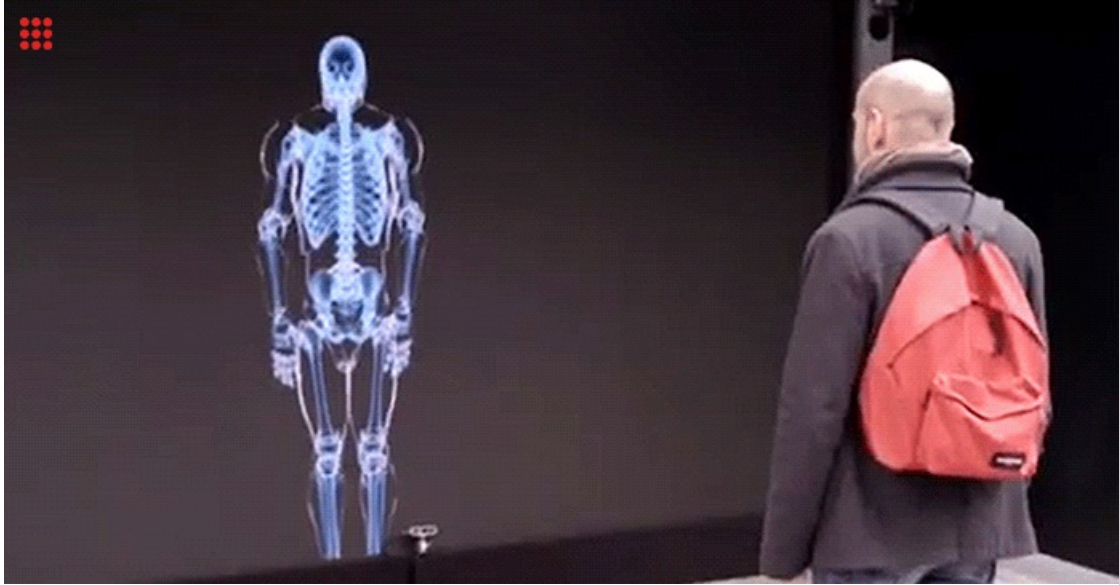


The real price of shock value

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

13 Dec 2022

Advertising can be an immensely powerful tool in changing human behaviour - and sometimes it has to attack, rather than seduce; especially if it is a public service campaign dealing with a major societal problem.



A colleague sent me a video of an activation done on behalf of the government of Quebec in Canada and which was aimed at cutting down on the scourge of “jaywalking” (crossing streets illegally) in its cities.

Jaywalking is a common occurrence in many major cities and it results in many people getting maimed or killed every year, leading to increased medical and other costs for the authorities. The idea to bring home the dangers to pedestrians was to take a gut-punch scenario to them, right on those very streets where jaywalking is rife.

A screen was set up in a bus shelter, along with clever technology which produced a human skeleton figure which mimicked the movements and gestures of those looking at it. And, naturally – with humans being vain and curious creatures, – most were riveted by the image on the screen which copied them exactly.

Then, suddenly, as the entertainment was at its peak, a similar silhouette of a car would suddenly appear, smashing into the alter-ego of the watchers and tossing a now limp body into the air.

The brutal transition from movement to crash to lifelessness took spectators' breath away and made them receptive to the message: "Bone vs steel. You don't stand a chance", followed by "Cross at intersections".

It's a great piece of advertising and underlines the fact that advertising can, at times, take the gloves off, especially when it comes to public service campaigns.

An Orchid to the Quebec government.

Learning to read the room

Public service campaigns, to many of our politicians, seem to be an opportunity to use their own images plastered everywhere. But government communication can, and should, be about more than that.

Ironically, one thing a number of government or quasi-NGO organisations don't seem to worry about is timing. And that is something critically important when you're trying to convey a positive message at a time when there is very little that is positive happening in South Africa.

Two examples of failing to "read the room" came to mind in the past week:

First up was the Government of South Africa, using its official Twitter feed to commemorate International Anti-Corruption Day. It would certainly have been wiser, given the mess that is the Phala Phala saga, on top of the mess which is Eskom, against the background of the mess caused by the years of state capture, to have ignored this one.

Yet, not only did @GovernmentZA not do this, it posted an announcement from the department of public service and administration about an event at which the keynote speaker would be the acting minister of that department, Thulas Nxesi.

MEDIA ALERT: INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION DAY



The Acting Minister of Public Service & Administration, **T.W. Nxesi**, will deliver the keynote address at the first session of the **2022 International Anti-Corruption Day** event.



Unisa, Senate Hall



08h00



Thu, 08 December 2022



“The Cost of Failure of Governance and Ethics in the Public Service: A collective response to tackle the scourge of corruption in the Public Sector”



the dpsa

Department:
Public Service and Administration
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



He was the man, lest we forget, who jumped in, boots and all, to defend the spending of R260m+ of public money on Jacob Zuma's sprawling homestead at Nkandla.

Nxesi argued that the “fire pool was” key for firefighting, citing an assessment that raised a “possible outbreak of fire, as most of the structures have thatched roofs and are close to each other”.

Not only is the promotion of anti-corruption and Nxesi not reading the room, @GovernmentZA, but it is also spitting in the faces of South Africans who have seen their country brought to its knees by the corruption of the ANC and all its apparatchiks.

An Onion for that.

Next up in the “read the room” stakes, is Johannesburg's City Power. It posted an invitation to Twitter users to come to see the Festival of Lights at the Joburg Zoo.

Lights? At a time when you, CityPower, are leaving people without power, bringing them back late from loadshedding and often not even responding to them on social media?



On top of that, entry fees in these straitened times are not cheap. While I do appreciate you're struggling with a broader problem which is not of your making, it is a bit of a slap in the face for hard-pressed electricity consumers (or should that be non-consumers?) so say that life goes on and it's business as usual.

It isn't. And maybe an Onion will bring that home to you...

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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