

Timeless wisdom in Allan Gray's 50th anniversary ad



By [Brendan Seery](#)

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It's in times like these – global uncertainty, inflation, low growth and other terms so beloved of economists – that your investment advisers will tell you that you must “give it time” when you start worrying that your retirement fund is being overtaken by aforesaid inflation.



It's true of course that real growth in any financial nest egg requires patience and that time does bring dividends. Not that that eases anxiety at this moment...but that's another story.

Time

“Give it time” is the message of the latest Allan Gray commercial, which marks its 50 years of long-term investing, the company says.

“We have learnt that time is the greatest gift of all. And in honour of our 50th anniversary, we celebrate decades of commitment, conviction and courage through everchanging times and trends.”

The main execution is another in a long line of sophisticated, elegant commercials for the company which, as the best ads do, transcends mere marketing and passes into lyrical story telling.

This one features a trumpet player, who hits the big time back in the late 40s I would guess. He is feted, he makes money... but as newer music, from rock n roll to disco to hip hop, assumes centre stage, he falls more and more out of the limelight. He is eventually busking on the street to keep body and soul together.

But he hasn't been forgotten and one day the call comes. He's given the opportunity to headline a big event and play to a whole to audience of fans. Give it time is the message which flashes up.

Solid and sophisticated

What really makes the film (because that is what it is) is that it is so well observed and crafted. It is shot in black-and-white throughout, encapsulating the shades of the player's heyday but also presenting a gritty, documentary air.

It's like watching a classic movie. In the process, though, it makes Allan Gray's point that "everything comes around" eventually. It's a soothing message. It also reinforces the image of Allan Gray as solid but at the same time sophisticated – both attributes you'd like to see in those entrusted with your money.

An Orchid to Allan Gray, which still sets the benchmark for financial advertising.

Ego trip

Interestingly, the message here is almost the opposite one from that of Coronation Fund Managers which urges people to save early so they can enjoy their wealth before they're too old...



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Government advertising – especially in this part of the world – does not seem to have to comply with any of the metrics in the commercial equivalent. In other words – why worry about creativity, return on investment or those pesky capitalist measurements as long as you can have the photo of your principal in a prominent position?

Even less should you worry about those restrictive old-fashioned, un-transformed things like proof-reading...

The latest ego trip for Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi hits all of those spots dead centre.

Highlighting weaknesses

The print execution was for something so earth-shattering that it needed to be on the front page of *Sowetan* newspaper – the switching on of transformers in Orange Farm. The placement was perfectly timed – just as the ANC-controlled Eskom ramped up load shedding to stage four.

No electricity, no transformer, presumably.



Then there was the obligatory pic of the Premier overshadowing all over graphic design elements in the ad – no surprise either, given that politics in Africa is about the cult of personality and that Comrade Lesufi has his eyes very much fixed on the Union Buildings prize.

And the obligatory error which went through un-noticed... a “partnership with City and Eskom”. City who?

This sort of image building campaign has little to do with service delivery and everything to do with using taxpayer money to push first the ANC political agenda and second the personal political agenda of Lesufi.

From a marketing perspective, it could have been done much better. Who would choose to highlight “progress” in the power sphere when the blackouts are still a nightmare feature of everyday life? In marketing it is best not to highlight the weaknesses of your product...

An Onion for such blatant attempts at electioneering.

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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