

Don't hit the road, Jack

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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It is bizarre, in marketing terms anyway, that a brand can thank its customers for not using its products.

But this is the age of Corona and the marketing rule book has effectively been thrown away.

But the SA National Roads Agency (Sanral) – not exactly the average person's favourite state-owned enterprise because it brought us toll roads, electronic or otherwise – has put together what I think is a striking and effective piece of brand marketing, by saying thank you to South Africans for not using the highways.

Sanral says South Africans have heeded the call to stay at home and retard the spread of Covid-19.

They've done what plenty of other well-meaning brands have done since the pandemic brought the world to a standstill.

There is so much of that around, I think any advertiser who uses clichéd images of empty streets, does so at their own peril.

The opposite, strangely, is true of the Sanral ad. It has given the agency which builds our pinnacle roads the opportunity to

show – without the picture being cluttered by traffic – just how awesome and world-class their work is.

Those empty roads speak to loneliness and desolation, it is true, but they also speak to their importance as the arteries of commerce, arteries which have already started flowing.

Of course, the elephant in the room which understandably does not get a mention is the question of how these national assets will be funded. Because of the lockdown, Sanral's own and operated toll roads (but mainly the Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project's e-tolled highways) have been taking a hammering, income-wise.

It is even more unlikely, given the battering people's personal finances have also taken, that the e-tolls can function properly again ... and we will have to face the reality of funding our roads some other way.

Even in that regard, this ad still does a great PR job for Sanral by underlining that we need an organisation like this if we are to grow and be taken seriously as a nation.

So, an Orchid to Sanral.

While there have been plenty of clichéd attempts to leverage global lockdowns to sell products – and the more these are employed, the worse the return gets – an ad has to be really good to stand out in the clutter.

I like one from overseas, done for condom-maker Durex, which is pretty risqué (if you are easily offended, stop reading now) but perhaps a bit of ribald humour is what we need in times like this.

Playing on the ubiquitous messaging calling on all of us to “stay safe”, the Durex ad features two ways – and two forms – of protecting your loved ones. A surgical mask protects you when “going out”; a condom protects when “going in”. No explanation necessary...



It's probably offensive to some, but it fits with the Durex profile of not shying away from issues like protected sex, the opposite of which can cause as many, if not more, problems than the coronavirus.

So, an Orchid (made of rubber) to Durex.

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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