

How to do real sincerity



By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Challenge: lessons for SA Brands from overseas work; Advertisers in this country must 'push reset button' and come up with new material...

One of the most overworked clichés of 2020 – apart from “in the time of coronavirus/ Covid-19” – must be “we’re all in this together”.

It’s well past its sell-by date, as the realisation sinks in that humanity really didn’t “push the reset button” (oops, another one) because of the global pandemic.

We’re still as selfish, angry and narrow-minded as we’ve always been ... it’s just that when we all thought we faced a common enemy, we were better at hiding it.

When it comes to business, capitalism still seeks to squeeze as much blood out of the profit stone as it can – and competition is still cut-throat.

The lockdowns and loss of turnover saw many in the hospitality business go to the wall and in SA there was a praiseworthy effort to get restaurants to work together (an initiative of the dynamic and innovative Ocean Basket chief executive Grace Harding), to lobby government to ease lockdown and, in the longer term, increase their effectiveness as bulk buyers.

I was struck by a similar sort of sentiment this week from Burger King UK, which got people talking on social media with its ad headed: “Order from McDonald’s”.

“Restaurants employing thousands of staff really need your support at the moment.”

“ We know, we never thought we’d be saying this either. pic.twitter.com/cVRMSLSDq6— Burger King (@BurgerKingUK) [November 2, 2020](#) ”

It’s a show of solidarity as Britain – or large parts of it anyway – is in lockdown again.

It’s a magnanimous gesture from one of the big players in the fast-food business, but shows a brand comfortable enough to give its biggest rival a plug.

Of course, it is not completely altruistic, as the last line reminds customers: “Getting a Whopper is always best, but ordering

a Big Mac is also not such a bad thing.”

Orchid for Burger King UK.

There’s a lesson there for SA brands.

Other lessons for SA marketers and ad agencies can be learned overseas. I am in danger of falling asleep at the current lack of standout work here at home.

The US department store chain, Kohl’s, said to be the biggest in that country, has always had a reputation for doing noteworthy Christmas ads ... perhaps not as talked about as those done by Coca-Cola, but good nevertheless.

A feature is the ads’ simplicity and heart-tugging emotions. This could lurch into maudlin or cheesy, but seldom does.

This year, Kohl’s reminds customers that “this year looks different – and so do our wish lists”.

“Where once we just wished for things like toys and tech, we’re now wishing for happiness, understanding and kindness more than ever. And time spent together is the greatest gift of all ... give with all your heart.”

To illustrate, we see a young girl reaching out and making contact with the old woman in the house next door – not physical contact because of social distancing, but a psychological and emotional connection.

They exchange messages, scribbled on paper and held up to each other’s window. And build the friendship.

Come Christmas, the old woman is not there. We don’t know where she’s been, although a hospital-type wrist band gives us a clue.

The little girl goes downstairs to see her family celebrating and getting ready to open presents and rushes back upstairs ... to see her friend, back in the window across the way.

“Did you get what you wished for?” is written on the piece of paper the old woman holds up. The little girl nods.

It’s simple, it’s touching. And it reminds us what the holidays – however we celebrate them – are all about.

Kohl’s the brand is always in the background and you see only a flash of a packing box here or there to remind you that’s

where you get the presents.

The ad, in making us feel good about ourselves and giving us hope in an often hopeless world, makes us feel good about the people who brought us this.

So, an Orchid to Kohl's for classic Christmas advertising. Let's see what we come up with locally.

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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