

Reaching for the sky

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Safair: latest commercial enhances already solid reputation; Airports Company of SA is a collection of close-minded bureaucrats...

Let's be honest, it's not too difficult to stand out from your competitors when you're operating a South African airline.

Financially, just about everybody is crashing and burning – and not just from the effects of Covid-19 – so when you've managed to fly above that sort of business turbulence, you're already ahead of the game.

Even before coronavirus changed the way South Africans use airlines, FlySafair had been establishing a solid reputation for itself for the friendliness of its crews, its competitive fares and, very quickly, the best "on time" airline in the country.

My wife has flown with them on a few occasions down to George (her parents are in Knysna) and she can vouch for the old marketing saying that a good product backed with excellent service is the cheapest form of advertising, because it gets you repeat business.

Repeat business comes at a fraction of the cost of new business, any accountant will tell you.



Yet still, the latest ad for FlySafair – urging people to get flying again now that the lockdowns are being eased – is appealing for its simplicity and the reminder that things are getting back to normal.

Parts of the ad, the airline admits, were shot before the Covid-19 restrictions, so you do see people embracing without any social distancing. However, when people are boarding the FlySafair Boeing 737, you see the flight attendants and passengers all wearing masks.

This is an airline, the message clearly says, which takes your health and your personal safety seriously. My wife's experience on the flight down to George also bears this out. Passengers were separated by an empty seat and no food or drink (other than water) was served during the two-hour flight, in order to reduce the risks of contamination and infection.

Also, the toilets were sanitised by the crew after every use.

But Covid-19 safety is one thing; overall safety is another – and here I am talking about financial security, which clearly FlySafair has, whereas others do not.

Whether you like it or not – and this may or may not happen in this country – but when an airline is cash-strapped, safety is often compromised.

The FlySafair commercial gives me the solid feeling of reliability, which is what I want in an airline. It does its marketing job well and gets an Orchid from me.

Government departments or state-owned enterprises don't have to care about what their customers – us – think, because we are a captive audience and we work to support them, not the other way around. A good example is Airports Company South Africa, which looks, on the surface, like a commercial operation but which is, in reality, still a collection of close-minded bureaucrats.

And, they don't really have any opposition so they are, seemingly, under no obligation to treat their customers with respect.

Reopening OR Tambo to expanded airline traffic saw a "clever" at Acsa decide, unilaterally, to close off the drop-off and collection zones at the airport. And then not to tell anyone about it.

The resultant traffic chaos – as people tried to see what the new arrangements were – generated huge comment on social media.

Knowing my wife would be flying this week, I checked out the Acsa website and was informed that now I would have to park on one level of a parkade to drop her off and on another level to fetch her. I would not, though, be allowed in the main terminal building. How this helps prevent the spread of Covid-19 better than people parking in the open, observing social distancing and wearing masks is beyond me.

Initially, it seemed as though Acsa would charge for the parking – and that was the case until someone saw this could be an image nightmare. Then it was announced that people dropping off or collecting passengers would get a 20-minutes grace period.

That sounds reasonable – until you realise that OR Tambo's parking system only allows slightly more than two cars a minute to leave each of the parkade levels.

With as many as 100 cars stacking up, lots of angry people are not going to get through in the grace period – and will have to pay.

Not that you care, Acsa, but you get an Onion for incompetent logistics management, as well as one for appalling communication.

If you were in a competitive industry, you'd go bust...

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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