

A great idea, but common sense took a holiday

By  [Brendan Seery](#)

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The first Orchid this week goes to the Western Cape government and its office of consumer protection. But at the same time, they get an Onion. Let me explain.



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There was an eye-catching ad in our Independent Traveller section, Cape edition, this weekend.

It caught my eye because I couldn't believe the numbers. Alongside a pretty pic of a family gambolling happily on a beach, there is a bold headline: "Seven day Cape Town family holiday special."

Underneath it is: "Kids stay free" and then "only R2,000 pps beachfront hotel" and, under that, "free car hire".

It purports to come from an outfit called "Holiday king - cheap family holiday specialists".

But there didn't seem to be any readily visible contact number.

Then my eye moved across to the right-hand side of the ad: "Save 100 percent off this holiday!" it said. And, below that, the punchline: "Don't go."

As I read on I discovered it was a warning from the Western Cape government Office of the Consumer Protector - "beware of holiday scam ads". It gave contact numbers and urged people to report such fraud.

All in all, a clever piece of advertising. Bait and switch, sting in the tail - call it what you will - it worked so well because of the unexpected twist.

So a well-deserved Orchid for the creative minds behind the ad and to the provincial government.

However, people, what on earth was the purpose of running the ad only in a Cape Town publication?

Do Cape Town people fall prey to scam ads for holidays in their own city?

There can't be that many of them. On the other hand, many people each year are scammed by too-good-to-be-true offers for holidays. Many of them are in Joburg, which is also where the bulk of local tourist-spend originates (please don't accuse me of being provincially chauvinist - it is what it is).

And, I would guess, there are Durbanites who succumb to the temptation to go to the fairest Cape for Christmas and who also get taken in by the con artists.

So, whoever does your media planning, Western Cape government, they get an Onion. Maybe you need an Office of Common Sense...

I am not normally a fan of digital marketing platforms - not because I am an old technophobe (I bet I know more about net marketing than most of you reading this), but because it generally doesn't work.

The best places for marketing are destination sites - and the places you go to for research and to book. There are plenty of those out there, but many of them miss a trick or two by not maximising the potential of eyeballs on content.

One site that does is for Newmark Hotels. I went there this week to look up some information on their Motswari Game Lodge property. Not long after I opened the landing page and started looking around, a discreet and quiet pop-up window materialised on the side of the page.

It said it was the "Concierge" and asked whether there was anything I needed help with.

What a clever idea. Haven't seen anything like it before - and I especially like the classy way it has been done: a concierge, unobtrusively in the background, sorting out problems, providing information, is exactly what good quality hotels provide as part of their bricks-and-mortar service.

Orchid to Newmark Hotels. Now you've seen it, everybody else, remember about flattery and imitation.

Sometimes international events can undo the best-laid marketing plans. So, for instance, print and TV ads with a Parisian theme would have been impossible to pull or modify in the wake of last Friday's outrage.

However, I found some insensitive digital marketing efforts this week that could well have been stopped in their tracks with little effort and at short notice.

The first - pointed out by someone in the public relations business - was in an e-zine which ran an ad for travel insurance. The photo was of a smiling person posing in front of the Eiffel Tower. That could have been pulled temporarily and the fact that it wasn't shows insensitivity or a lack of flexibility in marketing. Both grounds for an Onion.

Even worse though, was a release put out on Monday on behalf of Edgars about the new Scandale Paris fashion underwear range.

Doesn't anyone pay any attention to the news?

All I felt was a tinge or revulsion when I saw it - not a great way to market a product.

That this release could have been put on ice for a few days, but wasn't, attracts the same criticism as the e-zine. And gets a similar Onion.

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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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