

You are at Liberty to rewind, reflect, refocus

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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It's hard not to be a cynic at this time of year, when the season of goodwill is hijacked by marketers.

My default mode is cynical so it takes quite a bit to surprise me.

Last month I was immediately struck by the alliterative simplicity of the words on a newsletter/Christmas card from Liberty, my insurers. Rewind, reflect, refocus. That is, I think, what we'd all like to do after another "you cannot possibly make up this stuff" year in the history of our battered country.



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Rugby, cricket, politics - we can't seem to play any of them very well. So, rewind, reflect, refocus was enough to make me pause... and look.

And I saw an interesting newsletter, which urged me to "give thought to the year ahead". There were intriguing articles on "investment gifts" (if only I had the money, but it is nice to dream); "3 things to let go of before January"; "Money smart tips for the New Year".

Well designed and laid out, easy to read - but, most importantly, it cast Liberty as the knowledgeable helper, someone who can help navigate the increasingly perilous waters of the South African economy (thank you, No 1...)

So, an Orchid to Liberty. And a special one to the copywriter - I love to see good use of the language.

Public relations people can be worth their weight in gold for a brand if they know what they are doing, but at the same time they also have the ability to annoy journalists and media outlets through their ignorance or laziness (or both).

So, here are two examples of how to do it and how not to.

Scarcely had the ink dried on President Jacob Zuma's first finance minister shock (and the rand doing its impression of the Titanic) than an email popped into my inbox from The Travel Corporation (whose 30-plus award-winning brands include Trafalgar, Insight Vacations, Contiki Holidays and Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection).

Headed "Weak rand no match for TTC's rand price guarantee", the release was guaranteed to make you pause for thought. It read: "Theresa Szejwallo, managing director for the Travel Corporation group of companies, says that clients for all five brands will not be affected by the negative currency fluctuation, ensuring that clients can travel for less and won't be stung by the dramatic currency fluctuations."

But I particularly like the way the release ended, with what the ad people call that "human insight".

Szejwallo added: "The travelling public won't be receiving revised invoices from us and can enjoy a stress-free Christmas, knowing that they won't have to fork out more money for their 2016 holiday."

Clever, bang up-to-date "news marketing" and executed effectively and efficiently because Szejwallo understands the value of publicity and TTC's public relations person, Amanda Hardy, knows exactly what the media want and how to push their "news buttons".

Orchid for TTC and the Szejwallo-Hardy team...

On the other hand, not paying attention to events happening around you - or, even worse, not even looking at the medium in which you hope to get coverage for your client - is grounds for an Onion.

So, one goes to an account executive at Ogilvy PR Cape Town. She sent me a press release about the new Carling Black Label TV commercial four days after I had run the story as my main picture spread in Media and Marketing.

Please understand, I am a grumpy person, but it is not professional and it is exceedingly discourteous and disrespectful not to even look at the medium you will be addressing.

Pay attention, other PR people.

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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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