

'Techies' should be user-friendly

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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The reality of the great technological society in which we live is that new projects are often a case of the one-eyed man leading the blind...

Many people are so overawed by the technology that they allow the "techies" free rein to develop sites, apps or software as they (the techies) see fit.

Very seldom in the digital space has an internet-based idea been started with a business plan in mind: normally the techies build the idea, then sit there baffled as they ponder how to "monetise" it... i.e. make money off it - something they should have in mind before they started writing the first line of code.

Many business people are unsure or afraid of technology and many will tell you they don't understand it. That, of course, ignores the reality that if you are a business person and you have a business plan, the technology should be a mere tool.

So, often techies are allowed to put in place sites which are, frankly, not very user-friendly. And their bosses won't criticise them because they're afraid of being regarded as technophobes.

A case in point (at least from user-unfriendliness) is Absa bank's main website. A colleague grew frustrated when she could not find a list of bank branches. Remember, these are the places people go to in order to do business with the bank...

The site was filled with all the digital stuff: EFTs, electronic banking, phone banking - and plenty of advice about products. On the landing page there was no way to find a branch list. We eventually found one - but only after searching and going through about three separate steps.

Technology is supposed to make things easier, not more difficult, for your customer, Absa. So give your techies an Onion... because a frustrated and irritated customer may well take their business elsewhere.



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A similarly frustrating site - but for different reasons - is that of the N4 Bakwena toll road. This road is the main arterial to Botswana and the North West province and also, incidentally, features the single highest toll charge at one plaza (R75) for a light car in the whole country.

Travelling recently to Madikwe game reserve, I thought I would go on to the site to find out where the relevant service stations are, so we could take a comfort break or have a cup of coffee to break the almost five-hour journey. So I went to the site's FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions).

Now you'd think it would be reasonable that such a site would have information about the route and its services and facilities. No. The FAQ was almost totally devoted to pushing people to get e-tags, which are also accepted by Bakwena's toll gates.

With the current feeling among ordinary people in Gauteng (and elsewhere) about e-tolls, that information was not only useless, it was also bound to make a website user angry.

I don't suppose Bakwena cares whether it gets an Onion from me or not because it has a captive audience and doesn't really have to "sell" its product... but it gets one anyway.

By contrast, using the Mango airline website earlier in the year to book tickets for my son and his girlfriend to fly to George from Joburg was a pleasure. The site is bright, simple, easy-to-understand and fast. Payment, via credit card, was quick and easy.

And, Mango does what it says on the tin: on-time, cheery flying.

Interestingly, not long after I bought the tickets, I got a call from a Nedbank telesales man, asking me if I wanted to buy insurance. We chatted for about 10 minutes before he realised the money was only for internal flights... and that he was offering insurance for overseas travel.

Doesn't anyone check these things, Nedbank?

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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*

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