

Cruising to an Orchid

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

22 Jun 2021

Cruising to an Orchid; Liberty's powerful, thought-provoking response to North Face attack.



Covid-19 has hit the world hard and one of the sectors of the global economy which has been devastated has been travel and tourism - having been almost choked to death by lockdowns and movement bans.

One of the sub-sectors in the tourism market that has been particularly battered has been the cruising industry which, up to now, has been one of the fastest-growing businesses in the world.

Ships have been getting bigger, more luxurious and offering the best in food, entertainment and onshore excursions. This is no longer the place of The Love Boat where the lonely, old and retired go for fun.

Many more people are cruising these days because it is a convenient and cost-effective way to see the world.

The onset of Covid-19, however, pointed at just how possibly risky the cruise ship environment is when it comes to infections.

This, despite the fact that the industry was already ahead of the rest of the world in insisting on sanitising hands when

entering dining areas, for example.

It's going to take a huge marketing effort to get people to again relax and see cruising as a safe travel option (because it still is convenient and cheap). It has been comforting, in a way, to see cruise giant MSC Cruises going all-out on advertising campaigns to lure back passengers for its cruises in southern African waters towards the end of this year and early next year.

A simple, yet effective, print execution assures prospective travellers that they can go aboard once again and enjoy their 'dream holiday' in a 'safe bubble'.

That bubble is the systems and processes the line has put in place to keep the infection out of its ships and allow those who are cleared to board, relax, chill – or party – to their heart's content, without having to worry.

It's brave, because it tackles a sensitive issue head on – but, at the same time, the idea of a 'bubble' goes beyond merely speaking about medical safety ... it encompasses an image of a separate world, away from the hustle and bustle of home and insulated from the cares of the world.

I am sure the MSC campaign will remind many travellers (the line has really good return business) of the joys of the open sea ... and will tempt many more to sample the lifestyle.

So, an Orchid to MSC.

Liberty vs North Face

I was intrigued recently by a brand battle – or should I say brand counter-attack – which got the attention of consumers and the media in the US.

The North Face clothing and outdoor equipment brand thought it would be a great, politically correct move to have a go at the oil and gas industry. That business has already been slagged off from all sides because it is said to be the driver – through its CO2 emissions – of global climate change.

It doesn't look good from a pollution point of view either. People still remember the Exxon Valdez oil spill, which devastated the coastline of Alaska, as well as the disastrous BP oil rig fire in the gulf of Mexico, which similarly brutalised the environment.

But, on this occasion, at least one company in the oil and gas business, Liberty, was not about to take the attack from North Face lying down. Liberty CEO Chris Wright fronted a response to North Face, which was powerful and thought-provoking.

While he noted that the outdoor company had gone as far as to refuse that the logo of another oil and gas company could be put on any of its jackets, he then began by highlighting the dishonest or ignorant stance of North Face.

As much as 65% of human-made fibres contain chemicals from the oil and gas sector, Wright noted.

In the case of North Face, the percentages could go as high as 90% for their products. Then the killer: North Face is not only a customer of oil and gas, it is a partner.

It's brilliant defensive marketing – and deserves an Orchid for that. Yet, it is also a timely reminder that the truth about most things in life, including the environment – is not in the easily demarcated white or black; it is in the subtle shades of grey.

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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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