

Coming up smelling of roses

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

12 May 2015

Mother's Day is, in reality, nothing more than a cynical marketing con to get people to buy gifts. Yet I suppose if that prompts some children (and husbands) to remember the importance of the person who is the rock in most families, then I suppose I can't complain too much...

NetFlorist is one of those organisations that does a roaring trade around these special occasions, artificial or not. In the past, though, some of its radio ads have skated near to, and then gone over the line from humour to sleaze.

If they had done that with Mother's Day, it would have damaged their brand. However, the two radio executions I heard were funny and showcased the NetFlorist offering.

Once again, the very camp Harold is running "The Harold Mother's Day Hotline" and dispensing relationship advice [Click here](#) to listen to two of the ads.

My favourite is the query from a man who complains that every time he has an argument with his mother, she reminds him she went through 14 hours of labour to bring him into the world. Harold remarks that the mother probably "holds it over your head... especially if you have a big head". Slightly risque, but it brings a chuckle.

In all the ads, there was a "push to purchase" to get people to order their flowers (and choccies) in time for Mother's Day. And I'm pretty sure thousands of people responded.

So, Orchid to NetFlorist and its agency, FCB Joburg.



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Heavens knows there's not much joy around anywhere these days, so when you see pure, unadulterated joy on the face of someone, it stands out - and cheers you up. If that joy and love for life are part and parcel of an advert, you can't help but feel some affinity with the brand.

That's why I have to give Spur an Orchid for its latest TV ad for its Monday special offers. It normally airs on TV on Sunday nights, so for a start the timing is perfect.

We see two people sitting in a car, dressed to impress. She is big, in size and spirit, a large mama indeed. He, by comparison, looks almost insignificant - or he would if it weren't for the clear light of happiness in his eyes.

She starts singing in a beautiful, strong voice, and he joins in (also in fine tone) and they come together in perfect harmony - presumably as they contemplate Mondays and that you can get "two for the price of one" burgers at Spur.

It's clear that is where they are heading.

The ad is a nice 180-degree spin on a "blue Monday" and, I reckon, it will remain in people's heads the following day, even if their Monday is going badly - because they know things will get better by heading to the Spur.

A well-deserved Orchid.

Words - when used in conversation, written stories, in advertising and in public relations - need to be chosen with care. That's because they often have correct meanings that can change or even destroy the message you are trying to convey.

There was a good example of that this week from a crowing Ford Motor Company, which made marketing history last month when its Ranger bakkie series outsold Toyota's iconic Hilux. Ford's press release hit my screen first, followed less than a minute later by Toyota's.

As an aside: it was interesting to see Toyota's spin at work. Although the Hilux was toppled from its perch as South Africa's best-selling vehicle, Toyota's release focused on its being the biggest seller by volume.

Ford's release spoke about the Ranger's market share being "the best ever". The problem with that (and quite a common one, even among those who are supposed to be communicators) is that "ever" literally means that - for eternity. To claim that the Ranger's market share is the "best ever" is not correct.

What if it grows even bigger next month?

The word you should have used, Ford, was "yet". It is the best Ranger performance to date.

And, lest you think I am being unnecessarily pedantic, let me show you why, from a marketing point-of-view, correct

grammar would also be good sales talk.

By using the word "yet", you would subtly have sent this message to Toyota: Look where we are already. And we are not done...

For bad grammar and for missing an opportunity to maximise your sales success, you get an Onion, Ford.

Some of the worst people for not watching their words are to be found - surprise, surprise - in government. Not all of them are like Mac Maharaj who, whatever you might have thought of his politics, was a consummate PR man - a pity he has retired.

Sometimes I think the problem begins in the heads of some of our top people. So Number One believed that a shower after sex would help prevent Aids.

Police commissioner Riah Phiyega, in her flick-flacks to justify the swimming pool built at Nkandla, called it a "fire pool" and said it was "well known that people in the rural areas use buckets to put out fires".

Then, the less said about King Goodwill Zwelithini, and how he was "misquoted", the better.

A government communications person who also needs to watch his words, and separate them from what is going on in his mind, is education spokesman Elijah Mhlanga.

Last month, the *Mail & Guardian* ran a good story about the national education department suppressing a highly critical report from 2013 about the state of education. It took Mhlanga more than a week to respond, but when he did, it was classic denial. The report, he claimed, had always been in the public domain.

The NGO that brought up the issue, Equal Education, and the *M&G* were a bit mystified and got no answers to their questions about when it was released, to whom and where it was now - because it was not on the Ministry of Education's website, nor could they find it by Googling.

"Curiouser and curiouser", said Alice, especially as Mhlanga accused *M&G* and the NGO of basically causing trouble about nothing.

By now though, the spokesman was on a roll.

Mhlanga told the *M&G* in his response that the department "knows which of its employees leaked the report and that the matter is being dealt with internally".

Really? A report in the public domain is somehow "leaked"? Logic is not your strong suit, apparently.

And when there is no logic in communication (particularly considering you are there to "market" the department), you get an 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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