

Lewis has it down pat, but minister should buckle up



By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Just because someone is a personality doesn't necessarily mean they will come across well in a TV commercial endorsing your brand.

Sportspeople, in particular, don't make the transition to marketing well – years and years of: “Ja, I suppose we just have to pick ourselves up from this and go forward,” don't help much, do they?

Jacques Kallis was good in endorsing Sanex anti-bacterial soap, but was a lot more effective when extolling the virtues of hair rejuvenation products or hair shampoos because of the Lazarus-like transformation of his scalp over the past few years.

So when I saw Patricia Lewis (remember her? Blonde, well... er... endowed singer, at home in Afrikaans and English) appear on a DStv “house ad”, I inwardly groaned.

Then I caught myself. A decade or so ago, I sent one of my reporters to do an interview with the peroxided diva – and the reporter came back highly impressed. What caught my attention were the quotes from Patricia – they were intelligent and grammatically correct.

Given that the reporter's language skills were not even on that level, and given that the interview had been taped and transcribed, I had to take back my unkind thoughts about “dumb blondes”.

Ms Lewis has made a lot of money in showbiz and she hasn't squandered it, so she is a smart cookie. And one shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

So I didn't, and started watching the ad – for DStv's Catch Up service – more carefully. What I saw was one of the most natural people in front of a camera – including TV and movie stars – I have seen in a while.

Patricia (you don't mind my calling you that, do you? You're not a 'Ms Lewis' to me) was word perfect, with just the right amount of read-between-the-lines cynicism about some of the silly “perving” she was supposed to do about a TV hunk.

Sometimes DStv ads can drive you to distraction – even when they are good, repetition tends to irritate – but this was one a pleasure.

So an Orchid to you, Patricia... and you can have one too, DStv.



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Someone also in front of the commercial cameras, but not nearly as comfortable as Patricia Lewis, was our Minister of Transport, Dipuo Peters. She was a lot more hesitant in delivering her lines and clearly not as relaxed as someone from showbiz (we may think politics is a form of comedy, but the transparency of the small screen is not something many politicians actively seek out).

However, I do salute her bravery in agreeing to be the face of a commercial about road safety. This spot, on behalf of the ministry and the Road Traffic Management Corporation, is bang-on with its plea to motorists: “Don’t ignore the signs.”

Those signs are, of course, the warning ones – stop signs being the favourite ones we don’t see – that alert us to danger ahead or from our lawless or reckless behaviour.

Peters doesn’t sit behind a desk to get across this message – that road crashes (good that you did not call them “accidents” because they’re anything but) – but sits behind the wheel of a real car. The car is seen driving to several places and past various signs. I doubt whether the minister was actually behind the wheel for those establishing shots, but the point is made.

The ad works because it shows a minister getting involved in the work of her portfolio in something more than a “get my picture in the paper” advert type of way.

And the message, which is one we all need to heed, gets through. The ministry, Road Traffic Management Corporation and the minister all get an Orchid – for effort.

Sadly, in the closing shot, when the minister still has her hands on the wheel, she doesn’t have her seat belt on. You may have stopped, but “no belt” can be misinterpreted.

The Onion this week goes to the automotive industry again. On the web this week, Minty’s, a well-known car parts and accessories dealer, was going on about “wheels and tires”. Tires? Come on people. We are not Americans. It may seem like a little thing, but it isn’t. I, as a consumer, would wonder if you, the people at Minty’s, might get American measures mixed up with ours.

And if you don’t know your kilometres from your miles, it is going to end in tears on the road. Please change it, people – and I may withdraw your 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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