

4X4Ever... and a mad dash to avoid the runs

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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It's been said many times but it's worth repeating: if you, as a brand, can develop an emotional connection with your customer, you could be rewarded with lifelong repeat business.

That's no more apparent than in the car business where, in these times of product parity (where car quality and performance has improved so much that there is very little real difference between the mainstream brands), customers buy with their hearts. Annoy them, break their hearts... and you'll see what happens.

Are you listening, Ford?

When I – and many others like me – buy a car, we want, most of all, trust and a faithful relationship. We want to know that the car we choose is not going to let us down. That's why many of the Japanese brands have done so well: they just do not let you down.

Another brand which has a long history of toughness and live-forever reliability is Jeep. The American manufacturer was, after all, the company which popularised the idea of a “go anywhere” 4×4 vehicle after its Jeeps kept the Allied armies moving against the Axis powers during World War 2. If it was good enough to defeat Hitler, it's good enough for me – in the early days at least, Jeep traded on that sort of patriotism.

Today, in a tough market for offroad and SUV vehicles, Jeep has been careful to maintain not only its tough macho character, but also continues to emphasise its faithfulness.

I was impressed – perhaps because of the timing, in view of the Ford Kuga debacle – of the Jeep TV ad, which debuted at last year's Super Bowl in the US and which is running on some DStv channel at the moment.

With a driving funky beat behind it, it's about “4×4 by land”; “4×4 by air”; “4×4 by sea”... in each case showing the beautiful and wild, out-of-the-way places your Jeep will take you to. Jeep, the ad says, takes you beyond the normal – and even if you're in the normal, in the city for example, you still know, like all other Jeep drivers, that you're different.



Screengrabs from the Jeep ad.

But it is the punchline, “4×4 Forever”, which places Jeep as an icon in offroading: its vehicles will live forever and so will its name.

Now, at the risk of attracting some hate mail from Jeep drivers who will regale me with stories about problems with their cars, I want to say the message is one which resonates. The customer wants to hear that this vehicle will change his or her life (and, in the ad, there is a sequence of a tough, no-nonsense woman driver using her Jeep to pull a fallen tree branch off a snow-covered road)... and that it will be around for a long time.

That’s faith, that’s trust. And that’s good marketing. So an Orchid to Jeep.

It’s not the fault of media planners – they put the ads where the audiences are. It’s probably my fault because, to the horror of Europeans I know, we often eat our supper in front of the TV (just like Americans, so the stereotype goes).

So I am not best pleased by having to watch a shapely blonde dashing for the office toilet with a bad case of the runs... as becomes apparent when the ad for Smecta diarrhoea treatment unfolds.

Way too much information, people. And can you also not keep on referring to it as “the gut”. It may well be the technical, scientific name for it, but to our English-taught sensibilities, it sounds a tad crude. It’s the stomach, thank you.

But, really – please put it on at some other time. Maybe this Onion will help remind you... and, so I hear, they are very good for your stomach.

It annoys me when brands or products make wild claims or try to be something that they are not.

I heard an ad on radio 702 the other day for the SA Breweries (or should that be AB-InBev blah blah blah these days?) for the World of Beer permanent experiential centre in downtown Joburg.

It is, so I have heard, a great place to visit, either as an individual or as a group.

But, what it is definitely not, is as the ad claims, “the biggest tourist attraction in South Africa”. I don’t think it is the biggest one in Gauteng, or even in Joburg. The most you could say is that it is the biggest tourist attraction in Miriam Makeba Street.

I’ve told you a thousand times not to exaggerate!

So SAB – or whatever your new owners call you these – an Onion for you. It provides a nice balance to a Castle Lite...

For more of Brendan Seery's writing, see: www.orchidsandonions.net

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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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