

Two sides of the advertising coin

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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If your public persona is that of a no-holds-barred investigative journalist and you've been busting dodgy people for the best part of 40 years, you need to think very carefully about how, and where, you lend yourself to a commercial enterprise which is built on your personality.



I imagine *Carte Blanche* anchor Derek Watts did quite a bit of soul-searching before he agreed to be the main focus of the latest Castle lite ad.

We see him strolling around various places and, at every turn, people are ducking and diving (like the fake blind beggar) because they don't want to end up being featured on *Carte Blanche*. Watts wonders, in the soundtrack, if everyone is scared of him and that perhaps he can be too serious at times.

Then he finds a pub and the bar person asks him: "What do you want?" Even as he is contemplating the meaning of life-type question, she puts an ice-cold Castle Lite in front of him. And he is transformed, as somebody puts on the dance music. He gets up to strut his stuff and for an old-ish White boy, he's not too bad at it either.

Soon, everyone in the pub is on their feet and getting down along with Derek.

The message is that we all need to lighten up – in more ways than one. And Castle Lite is an option, in that case.

The ad quickly went viral on social media – the Holy Grail for marketers because it is, as they say in the military, a “force multiplier” for your brand message. I didn’t see one negative comment about Watts or that he might be tossing away his hard-earned reputation for the sake of a booze ad.

I didn’t see it that way and think that the obvious energy and joy in the ad shows that, genuinely, people were having fun on that set.

Watts told *The Citizen* that when he was approached, he was a bit concerned that the producers decided on him because, he admits, “I can be quite a boring person.”

Executive producer of *Carte Blanche*, John Webb, said he liked the tone of the pitch and the opportunity to prove that the show is not “overly negative” as some believe.

Watts also told *The Citizen* that director Anton Visser, who shot the commercial for advertising agency Ogilvy Cape Town, had produced “magic”.

I agree. Watts is amazingly relaxed and hints at some acting talent buried deep beneath the craggy reporter outside.

Orchids to Watts, first and then to Visser for bringing it all together in such an entertaining way and finally to Ogilvy Cape Town for the concept.

Trading on the personality of a well-known journalist like Watts to make a light-hearted commercial is, in my view, no breach of journalistic ethics, because quite clearly it is an advertisement and everyone seeing it would regard it as such.



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In newspapers, where I have worked all my life, there are strict guidelines about advertising and “advertorial”, where they must be clearly marked so that the reader is not misled. Many advertisers kick and scream about this because they want their marketing plugs to be in the exact style of normal reporting (which is not normally allowed), hoping to fool the punters into thinking that what they’re reading is genuine editorial content.

It appears there is no such restraint at radio station 702, judging from last week's shameless advertising (it went even further than being mere advertorial) on Clement Manyathela's morning show.

Nowhere during an insert on what was billed as a feature on "united collaboration" where listeners told this was an advertorial for BCX, the Telkom business unit.

So, an exec from BCX was allowed to "explain" what was meant by "united collaboration" – apparently sophisticated integration of voice and data to make your business run smoothly (but no huge difference from how we work, using web-based – and free – tools like WhatsApp and Zoom).



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But she went further in straight-out plugging the BCX offering by arguing people should avoid newer start-up companies in the space because BCX has more than 15 years of experience. Many a Telkom customer would probably note that they appeared to have learned little in that time, particularly when it comes to customer service...

Perhaps 702's listeners would not have noticed, in which case this was clever, albeit still sleight-of-hand marketing. But I did – and it's wrong. It's also the start of a slippery slope.

So Onions to 702 and BCX. In a world of constantly proliferating fake news, we need to keep advertising and editorial rigidly separated... as is done with political advertising.

Got anything you'd like to say or got any great work I may not know about? Drop me a line at brendanjseery@gmail.com

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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