

City Lodge and TBWA's funny take on South African life

By  [Brendan Seery](#)

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There's a marketing/advertising theory that one of the best ways to get a consumer to buy into your product or service is to push the aspirational angle, loading on the glitz and glamour so a potential customer sees themselves in that fake little scenario.



Different approach

You see this commonly in ads for cars, perfumes and the hospitality industry. In the case of the latter, you can often rationalise the use of flash and luxury because you are wanting someone to effectively pamper themselves by booking into your hotel.

It is interesting, then – although not surprising given its track record – to see the City Lodge group taking a completely different approach to getting bums in its beds.

In a series of executions, running since late last year, the group has – together with agency TBWA – decided that ultra-realism, pitched with a healthy dose of humour, is how to raise awareness of City Lodge properties.

At the same time, it also reminds people that booking into a City Lodge room can be pampering – or at least an escape from the sometimes ugly reality of day-to-day South African life.

Escape

We see a young couple, clearly at the end of their tether with the monotonous daily chore of bed making. It's destroying them and he says to her: "I'm tired of this sheet..." (geddit?)

But you can escape from that humdrum world – and easily, too, by checking into a City Lodge. And then, as we see the couple sinking into the comfort of their room – their refuge from the chores – up pops the punchline: "Check into easy."



#BehindtheCampaign: Check into easy with City Lodge Hotels

Karabo Ledwaba 21 Nov 2023



Another timeous scenario – and, sadly, one which will probably still be appropriate for many years to come – is about load shedding, when one guy wonders to another if they can still remember what it's like to have electricity. He also misses his work group on the phone...only to hear he's been kicked off.

The answer is: "Check into easy". And we see them, happily ensconced in a City Lodge, working away on their laptops. One even "laughs in Millennial..." Nice touch, that.

The final ad in the series is about a family which goes for a summer vacation and gets themselves more than they bargained for – a nudist resort. Damn Dave, says the husband about the man who set it up for them.

"What's a nudist?" asks one of the kids in the back of the car

Check into easy – where there is plenty for the kids to do, too, including playing to their heart's delight in a sparkling (and safe) swimming pool...

It's a different approach – but one which appears to work, given that the City Lodge business is booming at the moment. It also takes advantage of the fact that, even when things are tough, South Africans still retain the sort of sense of humour they would envy in many other countries.

Orchids to City Lodge and to TBWA. The partnership has produced many funny gags over the 28 years they've worked together and is yet another example of how stable long-term relationships in the ad business definitely help the client bottom

line.

Target market

Looking back at some car ads from the 50s, 60s and 70s the other day, I was struck not only by the sexist nature of “this is a boy’s product” but by the frequent use of good-looking women to “sell” the cars...even though the boys would probably never let them behind the wheel.

I’m surprised that pretty females are still being used to showcase products in this day and age – to the extent that it looks ridiculously out of place.

A perfect example of this is the TV ad for Willowbrook Recliners, fancy electric chairs which help you get up and out easily if you are mobility impaired. One would have thought that people like this are likely to be getting on in years – but apparently Willowbrook thinks putting a very healthy, very pretty blonde as the demonstrator is going to speak to the target market.

Presumably while we’re all looking at her, getting into and out of the chair, we don’t really notice if it does what it claims. Why not put an older woman or man in the chair – one clearly struggling with mobility – and then show how wonderful the chair is at getting them up and about?

The whole ad jars because it’s been made to be pretty, rather than speaking to the target market.

If you place pretty above relevant in your marketing, you’re always going to get an Onion from me. So bounce up and collect yours, Willowbrook.

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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