

Change is as good as...

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Refreshing: Orchid for Cell C for reviving big brand storytelling; Capitalises on aspiration - which drives many to search for better lives...

There is not a lot of hardcore retail advertising out there at the moment – and that is understandable, given the lack of money for big-buck brand ad executions, as well as the need for clients to push their products and services hard to claw back some of the lockdown losses.

Brand advertising, in the economic good times, can pass for decent entertainment – especially if there is a story being told that touches people. And when times are good and cash is plentiful, those brand stories can often be only tangentially about the brand.

Companies which do that for their products are interested more in ensuring their name remains top of mind rather than setting out the nitty-gritty facts of pricing. In that sort of brand advertising, it is all about storytelling, done with emotion.

That seems to be the motive behind the latest big brand ad for Cell C. Given the company's somewhat uncertain situation at the moment, what was clearly needed was a reminder to consumers that it is still out there and still offering them something as a communications network.

The message of the spot revolves around change – change for the network itself, as it tries to refresh its brand and reposition in the market; and change for consumers who are fed up with their current networks (and who hasn't been there?) and looking for something different.

But at the same time, the ad also seeks to capitalise on aspiration, the thing driving so many South Africans to search for their better lives.

The story the ad tells – it doesn't have any real people attached so I'm assuming it is all fiction, although my knowledge of football means I may be wrong and it may be based on fact – is of a young girl who gets tired of everyone (mainly boys and men, actually) telling her what she can't do. What she wants to do is get involved in football and, eventually, through guts and perseverance, she becomes a football coach and rises to become the first female coach of a professional men's football team.

And the fairy tale ends with her bringing home the "championship" and proving her detractors, and the rest of the world, wrong.

Many of the people watching the ad will connect with that struggle and the hope that they can change the world – which is the Cell C punchline.

The ad gets an Orchid because it revives the big brand storytelling which used to be commonplace... but also because it shows Cell C is making brave moves to change and keep going.

E-commerce is something which has become part of the lives of most of us and the experience can vary from wonderful to woeful. There are still many people out there, though, who do a hybrid form of shopping – doing research online, but then going into a bricks-and-mortar store to clinch the transaction.

Maybe it's about dealing with a person rather than a "chatbot" which makes the difference. Maybe, these days, we're all a bit fed up with spending so much time in front of computer screens.

So it was with us, when my wife decided to shop for a new laptop.

Based on my experience with an office HP laptop, with a SSD (solid state drive), which adds reliability because it has no moving parts, I suggested to her that we look for a lower spec laptop than mine because she didn't want to spend a fortune or need plenty of bells and whistles.

Starting point was the HP website, where we quickly found a new offering – a laptop with a 256Gb SSD for R6,000. To make that human contact and get things done properly, we headed off to the HP store at Cresta on Saturday. The staff there knew nothing about the new entrant, but once we showed them a screenshot of the website, they looked it up on their system. No stock, but no worry, we'll order it.

You guessed it. No call from them on the Monday. So my wife rang them. "Who are you? And what are you talking about?" That was their response. She had to again send them the screenshot of the laptop.

Just before 5pm, someone called back to say, "Your laptop is here." When she told them she would collect it the following afternoon, there was hesitation on the other side of the phone with the explanation: "But other people have paid for it already..."

What? In other words, we don't get that we got it wrong and we'll flog the machine we ordered for you with no problem. Piss-poor customer service. So my wife told them to keep it. They didn't seem concerned or try to dissuade her.

At about 6pm, we ordered a 512Gb SSD Asus laptop (with a bigger screen, nogal) from Takealot, for just R500 more than

the HP offer, with half the storage space.

Adding an extra R95 for next day delivery saw the machine in my hands at 1pm the following day.

Upshot? Forget about me coming back to your Cresta store or your brand, HP. Your service and training of staff make me wonder what will happen when I have a problem with your product. And, hello Takealot. You delivered on your promises.

The experience shows you can be as clever as you like in the digital space but unless you prioritise customer service, you're wasting a fortune. HP you may collect your solid-state Onion with no moving parts (I'm not going to deliver it).

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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