

Reddy tells it like it is

By [Brendan Seery](#)

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And the DA's intrusive marketing campaign before the elections, using 'stolen' information, gets an Onion.



Ad agencies often shy away from political work. It's risky – even though it may pay well – because your current and future clients might assume your work for a political party means support for that party. In that respect, political campaigns are a lot different from normal marketing.

But when an advertising, marketing and design agency decides to stick its head above the parapet and make pro bono ads in the political space, it's either a brave, or a foolhardy, step.

We first saw the gut-punch print ads a few weeks ago and we agreed to run them, although we weren't sure who was behind them.



Vote for a better South Africa - If you don't vote, you may as well agree

Grid Worldwide 6 May 2019



The first set the tone for the other two, quoting the deputy chief executive of a non-government organisation as saying: "We would have all the intellectuals strung up, and the professors three feet higher than the rest; they would be left hanging from the lamp posts."

The next quote had the leader of a political party saying: “There is no system that has worked successfully for Africans, except the Zimbabwean system.”

The final one was: “The EFF is an elitist clique that steals from the poor and downtrodden,” – a comment from the whip of a political party.

All the ads, which also appeared as posters on the streets, had the arresting kicker: “If you don’t vote, you may as well agree. Vote for a better South Africa.”

As a way of emphasising the importance of voting and the importance of having your voice heard, there was nothing else to touch it.

The campaign was put together by Grid Worldwide in Joburg and the agency’s founder and chief creative officer, Nathan Reddy, when asked why he would do what some might consider a risky thing, replied: “We believe in the power of creativity to change lives. We believe strongly in the mediums we use to tell real honest stories. Especially in a world fixated on fake news.”

He reckons politics is part of our everyday life in South Africa, “if you ignore it, you’re not living in culture”.

He says:

“ Like journalism, advertising must have a conscience to the public we serve. Brands must have purpose and meaning in how they engage with society. Gone are the days of sell, sell, sell, I need to like you, before I buy you. And the only way I would like you, if I believe in what you stand for. ”

I would like to see more agencies doing this type of brave, stand-out work, instead of the grey, middle-of-the-road stuff they churn out for clients. Grey does not make for memorable and agencies and their clients need to realise this.

So Orchids to Reddy and his team for producing thought-provoking and socially relevant work but, above all, for making local advertising interesting.



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Daniel K. Maduku 8 May 2019



One of the most interesting – albeit sad and, as it turns out, out-of-touch – comments on the election last week came from Helen Zille – she of rapid-fire Tweeting fame.

She lamented that people had voted “against the one real challenger because they were irritated at receiving SMSs. Sad.”

It is not surprising that Zille blames voters (consumers) for failing to appreciate the marketing of her company, the Democratic Alliance (DA), instead of questioning whether the marketing strategy was appropriate in the first place.

In my case, I got 12 SMS messages from the DA and countless voice calls in the weeks preceding the election. This was irritating, certainly, but also worrying from the point of view that a party espousing liberal views would, in such a cavalier

way, think nothing of violating my privacy with its marketing messages.

That, dear Helen, is an issue that your target market – educated, thinking South Africans – is becoming increasingly concerned about.

The DA was not the only one using what I effectively say is “stolen” information, because I gave no one permission to use my personal details for such purposes. On that score, the ANC was even worse. President Cyril Ramaphosa’s message came personalised, with my name.

For the DA, somehow, the offence was worse, because it proclaims itself to be the champion of human rights (and privacy, in the years ahead, is going to become more and more prominent among those rights).

So, the DA gets an Onion for intrusive marketing – but a second one for taking the easy, digital way out. And, without questioning the effectiveness of the method.

“ *I believe that SMS marketing is probably the least effective medium open to marketers in South Africa today. Why? Ask yourself this quickly: have you, or anyone you know, ever reacted positively to an unsolicited SMS trying to sell you something (whether a life policy or a political party)? How many of you, or people you know, have actively trashed a brand for doing that?* ”

I rest my case. So, DA, your second marketing Onion is for not challenging the digital clevers who sold you the SMS snake oil in the first place...

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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