

Springboks prove we are indeed *Stronger Together*

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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I was watching a fascinating YouTube documentary this week on Edward Louis Bernays, the man many credit as being "the father of public relations". His genius, since microwaved by marketers and ad agencies across the world, was to take the idea of propaganda and turn it into the most successful business tool of all time.



Bernays developed the art of persuasion to the extent that he artificially created a desire in people for consumer products they didn't need and, in so doing, helped found the consumer society which is currently doing all sorts of harm to our environment – although, in fairness, the increase in demand has also resulted in an employment boom.

Prettier Siblings

The fact that advertising and marketing are the prettier siblings of propaganda – which is intended to create in ordinary citizens the belief they should sacrifice their lives (both literally and figuratively) for a political Utopia – doesn't mean they are any less dangerous to ordinary mortals.

Seductive public relations, for example – of the sort pioneered by Bernays – convinced people that tobacco smoking was actually good for their health, tens of millions of people went to their deaths believing that...

Marketing and advertising practitioners – and particularly PR people – therefore have a moral obligation to be as accurate as possible and not to mislead their target market. Whether they do or not is a huge debate in and of itself.

However, the converse can also be considered: advertising can play a vital role in nation-building, especially in countries which have been torn apart by internal conflicts. The same is true of sport – as Nelson Mandela was fond of saying, sport has the power to unify a country.

Nation building

That has been the case with our Springboks, who stand on the cusp of history, with a chance of winning the Rugby World Cup tournament for a record fourth time.

Their efforts on the field speak for themselves, but the massive marketing and advertising campaign around this year's tournament has produced not only some highly effective commercial advertising but also work which should be permanently on display in a museum of nation-building.

In saying this, I am well aware that the endorphins of victory are still flowing strongly through my veins after the nerve-shredding two games which propelled us into the final.

Yet, I defy anyone to watch the Springboks' *Stronger Together* set of promo videos, done by DStv and not get a patriotic lump in their throat.



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These are the people upon whose shoulders the hopes of a nation rest – and they're all just ordinary okses. They're shy, they're nervous in front of the camera...but that's what makes it so real. They outline who they're doing it for – from friends and family to the places they come from. It resonates because it is real.

The promos – and the relationships of the boys on the pitch – are real evidence that Springbok rugby has succeeded in doing what our politicians cannot – and that brings unity to our nation.

And while DStv is still in the background and doesn't try to steal the Bok moments, there is still a reminder that this is where

you're going to see it.

So, Orchids to the Springboks and to DStv. One only hopes the “gees” survives long after Saturday’s final, because this team is, more than anything else, a reminder that, when South Africans put their minds to something – and put the baggage of race behind us – we’re truly world-class.



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Cliches

On that note, I think the coverage of the tournament is another reminder about just how good our local SuperSport is at coverage of rugby. Their outside broadcast teams are really on the ball, especially when it comes to replays...something the foreign TV crews can't quite match. Ditto with our analysts who are all at the top of their profession...

One of the things which may have irritated Edward Bernays, were he still alive, would be the proliferation of cliches, not only in business but in the PR world.

When I get these releases in, I sometimes start playing “PR bullsh*t bingo” to see how many of the cliches I can mark off an imaginary bingo card.

And the release from Lebogang PR, on behalf of Kellanova, didn't disappoint in this regard. This company is what resulted from the separation of the cereal business of WK Kellogg Co., earlier this year.

Naturally, Kellanova, now an entity in its own right, was “excited to enter this new era.”

The companies would now be “better positioned” to:

- “Focus on its distinct strategic priorities, with financial targets that best fit its own markets and opportunities.”
- “Execute with increased agility and operational flexibility, enabling a more focused allocation of capital and resources in a manner consistent with those strategic priorities.”

Not only that, the company's vision was to “become the world's best-performing snacks-led powerhouse, unleashing the full potential of our differentiated brands and our passionate people.”

I could go on, but the business cliches piled upon each other for a few more paragraphs. Each one of these statements is also meaningless gobbledegook which explains nothing.

As with many of these releases, you have to ask “who cares?”, as did a news editor colleague of mine.

If you want to tell a story about a company, find a story about its “passionate people” and tell it through their eyes. That might stop sundry other people's eyes from glazing over.

Now, because I realise that this is not the fault of Lebogang PR – which would have to recycle the guff churned out by the US head office of the company – they don't get the Onion. But Kellanova you certainly do. Perhaps use the Onion to add a bit of flavour to your “powerhouse” snack brands...

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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