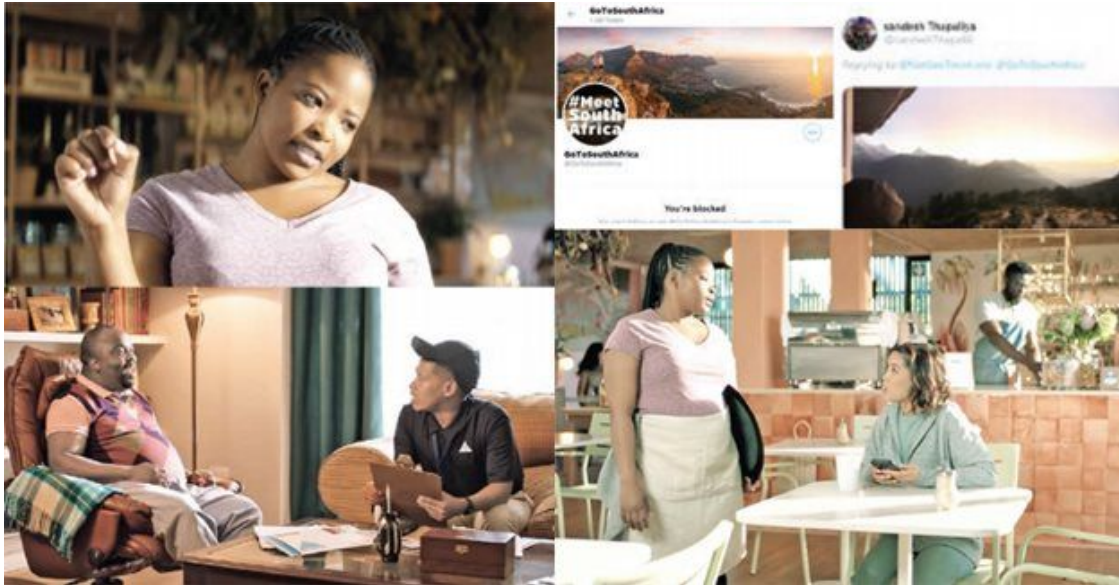


# 'Are you kidding me?'

By [Brendan Seery](#)

4 Feb 2020

Positive: Admitting to and rectifying mistakes can promote a brand. Negative: An Onion for SA Tourism and its PR and communications general manager...



Screengrabs from the Tops@Spar ad and Twitter exchange featured in #OrchidsandOnions this week.

This is one serious country. So serious, in fact, it is difficult to tell when it is real or when it is just someone taking the mickey. Mind you, there is not much difference between some “serious” real explanations and actual lunacy.

Often, in our day-to-day lives we’ll experience that “are you kidding me?” moment, when what you are being asked is so ridiculous that it seems like a joke. And that’s the sort of urban anguish Spar has tapped into with its ads for its Tops@Spar liquor outlets.

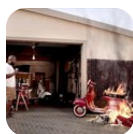
One that’s flighting at the moment has two examples of your average, outrageous, illogical behaviour... the sort of thing all of us are familiar with. We see a customer at a café asking her waitress for the Wi-Fi password.

Reluctantly – and with a scowling countenance (where have we seen that before?) – she reads out a long sentence culminating in a long number. The customer follows carefully, punching in the numbers, only to be told the figures should be “in words”...

Next is someone trying to fill in some forms for the householder, who sits beaming in his chair. That good nature is going to be tested to the full when the visitor asks him, clipboard in hand, “and lastly I am going to need some proof of residence...”

Behind the home owner are sundry portraits of him, which shows in the perplexed look on his face, which seems to ask: “If this is not proof I live here, then what the hell is?”

As the scene switches to a number of appealing-looking drinks, the voiceover reminds people that: “For every kind of serious, there’s a glass of not-so-serious,” at Tops@ Spar. That gets an Orchid.



#OrchidsandOnions: Let's drown our sorrows

Brendan Seery 29 Jan 2019



If your brand or company has a social media presence, you should remember that it is, in a way, part of your brand personality. And that people dealing with you will have the same aversion in the brand they follow to the distaste they would express for undesirable human traits.

So, if you do happen to make a mistake, admit it, move on and try to make it right. If possible, do it with humour and use the opportunity to promote your brand in a positive way.

“ Do not delete, mute or block when someone points out your mistake. Apart from anything else, the internet is a place where nothing ever really dies and where someone, somewhere has a record of your sly attempts at cover-up and denial. ”

One hopes the communication people at SA Tourism are paying attention.

This week, because I follow SA Tourism (#GotoSouthAfrica), I saw an odd photo pop up on my Twitter timeline. It had been sent to the #GotoSouthAfrica hashtag in response to them retweeting a *National Geographic* feature on beautiful scenes from South Africa and, in particular, sunsets.

Someone in the SA Tourism social media team jumped in immediately and thanked the poster for the lovely pic of South Africa. And that’s what got my attention, because the image was clearly *not* of South Africa. It looked to me like somewhere in the Himalayas, where they actually do have huge, towering snow-capped mountains and endless, layered valleys.



## 4 innovations to disrupt SA tourism in 2020

27 Jan 2020



I couldn't resist. "Seriously?" I typed. Which I thought was a gentle enough "Hey guys, not really..." way of pointing out their error in identifying the place as South African. Within minutes, the Himalayan picture had been removed. I couldn't believe it, so I went further down their timeline and found the original post of Sandesh's pic, which he later informed me, was of Nepal.

After taking a screenshot of it (as evidence – nothing ever disappears completely in cyberspace) I made a comment about it. And #GotoSouthAfrica blocked me. Sandesh and I exchanged a few posts about the pic, which he confirmed he had posted in error.

Suddenly, into that same conversation – which included Sandesh's pic – came SA Tourism's GM of PR and communications, Altaaf Kazi, explaining that the picture (pointing to the *Nat Geo* one) had in fact been taken in SA.

When I pointed out to Kazi what had happened, he claimed not to know about the Sandesh pic, or of my blocking, but that he would look into it. And surprise, surprise, he has not come back to me.



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Natalie Roos, Ninety9cents 16 May 2019



The lesson of this sorry saga is, for SA Tourism: try a bit more honesty. You are selling a country. It doesn't look good if you try to cover up and hide things... especially from a journalist, never mind one who runs a travel publication.

*“Blocking and deleting only provides evidence that you, as a brand, want to run away from something. And blocking is a bit like an ostrich burying its head in the sand and hoping its tormentor can't see it. The opposite is true. And, indeed, when your head is in the sand, your backside is sticking up in the air, presenting a juicy target.”*

But, overall, this sort of sneaky use of social media (which is an important marketing tool) is counter-productive. And that gets you an Onion, Mr Kazi and another for SA Tourism.

No doubt you will find out about this – even though you have blocked me.

## 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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