

SAA's bold promo to win back passengers has wings to fly

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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At the risk of being deluged by hate mail, I have been given some hope for the future of South African Airways (SAA) by their plans to revamp their oft-criticised Voyager frequent flyer programme...

Whether their promises of excellent customer service in the future are realised or not remains to be seen - but, from a marketing point of view, the airline offered some compelling calls to action when it announced the relaunch.



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In repositioning Voyager as a full-on loyalty programme, SAA offered a value proposition second to none. And, I also liked its slogan and catchline "Forever part of your journey".

It's the kind of statement which can pull at the heartstrings: you can trust us, we are there for the long haul, we are part of your life.

Interestingly, the airline did not rely on one of its possible strong emotional connections: We are South African, we understand you. Welcome home.

That's the feeling I have always got when getting on an SAA plane in a foreign destination... setting foot on that little piece of South Africa in a foreign field.

Despite the multiple (and often racist) whinges about our national airline, it still (in my view) attracts far more adverse comment than it deserves. In our house, for example, we will never fly Virgin Atlantic again, so bad was that experience.

SAA, by comparison, has varied from pleasant to excellent, both on domestic and international flights.

SAA, with the Voyager revamp, is taking a bold step and saying: We will win you back because this is the best deal you are going to get. That's brave.

That's good marketing. And it gets my first Orchid this week.

However, it will remain a conditional one because there are still, within the organisation, staff who got their jobs because of who they know and who believe life owes them something. And they could blow your good intentions right out of the sky, SAA.

Intelligent TV is almost an oxymoron these days. But I have just been reading a book by Simon Singh, *The Simpsons and their Mathematical Secrets*.

It's fascinating (and has a bit of brain PT to boot) and shows how deeply intellectual the writing has been on what, at first glance, appears to be a silly animated comedy series.

In the same vein, one of my favourite programmes is *The Big Bang Theory*, about scientists and nerds. It's funny, but also intelligent.

And, it really warms the cockles of an intelligent, advertising heart to see an advertiser who acknowledges that.

So, on a recent episode of *The Big Bang Theory*, I chuckled to see Medihelp using the "Soft Kitty" motif to plug its products.

Soft Kitty, you won't have to remind *The Big Bang Theory* aficionados, is the lullaby Sheldon likes to have sung to him when he is feeling blue.

Those who get it will love it and they will get the marketing line that Medihelp can be your soft kitty.

Orchid for that, Medihelp.

Warning: Grumpy old technophobe moment about to happen.

I got a note recently from a PR person trying to flog something which her client (an ad agency) had just done.

With an account to promote Namibian tourism, the agency had thought it a great idea to send a number of bloggers on a mystery tour to the desert of that country.

The PR representative called me to ask if I was interested in re-running the blogger's piece in our Travel supplement. What? I must run a story that you didn't offer to us because you thought a blogger was more important?

I then looked up the audience for the blog (quite easy to do - ask me and I'll let you know). The biggest number of hits in the past six months were 20,000 a month or 5,000 a week. Our travel sections, as a national collective, enjoy more than 800,000 readers a week.

Then I discovered another travel group had sent a blogger on a 5-star trip to Europe. I looked up his audience. He didn't have enough visitors to enable an accurate analysis although the web analytical services I use put his site ranking at below 206,100 in South Africa. Let me repeat: there are 206,000-odd sites which receive a bigger audience than he does... in this country alone. It seems that in the age of digital and social media, everybody is forgetting that you can't sell anything unless you have an audience.

And, while there may be those who say we, as newspapers, are dying, let me say one thing: 15 seconds before we breathe our last, we will still have audiences many times the size these bloggers can attract.

So, for those of you who are wasting your company's money on this sort of silly, supposedly cutting-edge communication, collect your Onions.

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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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