

Plan comes together

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Impressive: Top Gun-type advert promotes China's armed forces; But scatter-gun approach to offer CEO's ramblings would make any journo weep.



Why on earth would you need to market the military?

Simple – to ensure the donations, via taxpayer money or of your sons and daughters, keep rolling in to keep the arms barons (and the politicians in their pockets), as well as the generals, very happy.

The art of 'advertising' armed forces has been around, in the mass communications sense, for more than a century and a half.

One of the most famous icons in the genre was that of a top-hatted Uncle Sam, pointing out of a poster at the view and saying: "Your country needs you".

In the modern world, propaganda and military marketing are interchangeable and, because the entertainment media has as much, or more, clout, than the news media, the US military has had a purpose-built PR machine in Hollywood to do its bidding.

The US military even has a division dedicated to helping film-makers (with approved scripts, naturally) make “war” movies.

Everything from tanks to F14s (and the crew to operate them) is available to the right movie maker.

That is why it is so ironically interesting to see the Chinese government employing the Hollywood touch to produce videos promoting their ‘People’s’ armed forces.

One that was sent to me recently commemorated the anniversary of the Plan (the People’s Liberation Army Navy) – which was every bit as good, from a production value point of view, as any American jingoistic movie like Top Gun.

As the American filmmakers would do, the Chinese use the ordinary grunts, sailors and airmen (and they look as though they are genuine military people) to put together a mini story about an ‘enemy’ attack on land, sea and in the air, as well as under the water, when the submarines showcase their arm.

Overall, it presents a picture of a dedicated, capable and alert navy, marines, submariners and pilots all prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

It’s a reminder to those of us in the West, who may sometimes still believe the old stereotypes about inferior Chinese technology (badly copied from the West, the belief goes) and an oppressive dictatorial regime.

This little movie is very impressive and, ultimately, very good marketing.

I’m awarding the Plan an Orchid then, I wonder what a similar sort of project could do for the image of our own SA National Defence Force (SANDF). If any military in the world is in dire need of an image spruce-up, the SANDF is it.

PR horror show, part 3:

Less well done – but interesting from the ‘How not to do PR’ point of view – was yet another misdirected appeal to me to cover something.

That the e-mail was not addressed to me personally (which always gets my back up because it means you are just part of a huge scatter-gun target group, something journos hate) was the first clue of less than competent communication.

It was an offer from somebody who wanted a comment on the latest unemployment figures.

Perhaps it may have been interesting, but having already insulted me with the shotgun approach, PR, it was made even worse by another person saying: “Should you be interested in having us on the show...”

I don’t have a show. And it is doubly insulting to think you couldn’t have been bothered to take a little time to tailor your release to the platform.

Doubtless, others on your long hit list would have felt the same.

It’s a basic PR blunder – but it keeps happening. And I’ll keep giving it an Onion every time I see it ... not to mention spiking the release itself.

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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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