

# INFOMERCIALS

*Information networks within information networks*

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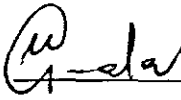
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## DECLARATION

I declare that "INFORMECIALS": "Information Networks within information networks" is my own work. All sources that I used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete reference.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "G. da", written over a horizontal line.

SIGNATURE

2003-06-24

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## Abstract

### INFOMERCIALS

#### *Information networks within information networks*

By Tholakele Celinhlanhla Gwala

In this thesis I characterise South African Infomercials as forms of persuasive mass media messages. After outlining the general nature of persuasive communication, and the relationship between persuasion and propaganda, I explain which communication codes advertisers use to promote their products, particularly which codes Infomercial advertisers use. After characterising a range of South African TV Infomercials I give a detailed analysis of the pioneering serial radio and TV Infomercials used by the company SA Natural Products (SANP) in their extremely successful campaign over the past two years to make the natural health food supplement **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** the best known and most used nutritional supplement in South Africa today. I in particular look at the forms of communication used by managers at SANP to create information networks within their organisational network to sustain the popularity of the product in the public mind, and to keep it supplied to pharmacies, health food shops and chain stores that sell it.

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## *Chapter 1*

### ORIENTATION

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will outline the contents of my thesis so that the reader will know what s/he will encounter in each chapter. In chapter 2 I present the problems that have prompted me to undertake this study, I set out the aims of my research and briefly explain what research procedure I will follow to document present-day South African infomercials. In chapter 3 I provide the key concepts that serve as theoretical framework for my study. Because infomercials, the focus of my study, are persuasive mass communication messages, I detail mass communication in chapter 4 and characterise Infomercials as mass communication messages. In chapter 5 I outline the various types of communication codes that are used in Infomercials against the background of the canonical communication model. In chapter 6 I give a general characterisation of the South African Infomercial industry I among other things look at typical South African Infomercials as persuasive mass communication messages, the TV channels and time slots that are used to transmit infomercials, and the companies that use Infomercials in conjunction with other forms of marketing to sell their products. In chapter 7 I make a detailed analysis of the range of communication networks within communication networks that the company SA Natural Products (SANP) uses to promote its products. I specifically look at their campaigns that have made the product **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer**<sup>®</sup> one of the most sought after natural health food supplement in recent years. In chapter 8 I summarise the results of my study and present my conclusions.



## Chapter 2

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will state which problems there are with regard to South African infomercials. Thereafter I will state the aims of my research, and I will indicate what research methodology I used to find solutions to these problems in order to meet the aims of my research.

#### STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS TO BE ANALYSED

In this thesis I focus on the use of Infomercials as forms of persuasive advertising in the electronic mass communication media. Infomercials are TV or radio programmes that provide information about useful products to viewers who feel some need for self-improvement with the intention of selling those products to them. The aims of study are (a) to describe the principles, codes and structures that underlie infomercials, (b) to characterise South African infomercials, and (c) to analyse in detail the hierarchy of information networks, and the central role of Infomercials within such a network, that sustain a particular product such as *Spirulina* or the *Betakit Global Focus System*.

#### Problem 1: Characterising Infomercials as a form of communication

Infomercials have relatively recently become popular forms of advertising in South Africa. A SABINET search of Infomercial references in South African libraries has shown that only two texts are available locally. A search of *Amazon.com*, an Internet bookshop that offers more than 4 million book titles, revealed that there are only three texts that are available there. Other online sources for information about Infomercials will have to be identified and exploited.

#### Problem 2: Foregrounding covert information in Infomercials for analysis

Infomercials, like all forms of advertising encode overt as well as covert information. The first problem is to identify and describe the overt and covert codes in infomercials.

Certain of the information codes are covert because they persuasively operate below the level of conscious awareness in all forms of effective advertising.

### **Problem 3: Identifying and describing the hierarchy of information networks that sustain infomercials.**

In order for Infomercials to succeed as forms of advertisement, they have to be sustained by a hierarchy of information networks that make the product on sale available, that precede the making of the infomercial, and that de-massifies the unidirectional flow of information which characterises all forms of mass communication. The information networks that sustain Infomercials will have to be identified and described.

### **AIMS**

The four aims of this dissertation are: (1) to characterise Infomercials as a form of persuasive communication; (2) to identify and describe the overt and covert codes that are used to construct infomercials; (3) to characterise the relationship between Infomercials and advertorials; (4) to identify and describe the hierarchy of information networks that sustain infomercials.

### **RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

The project is of a descriptive nature, entailing the following:

- A review of the relevant literature on cognition, communication science and infomercials.
- Based on the analysis of video taped programmes, a general characterisation will be given of typical Infomercials that South Africans are exposed to in the mass media.
- The communication codes in Infomercials that enable them to operate persuasively below the level of conscious awareness will be identified and described.
- A selected number of Infomercials will be analysed to determine the general entertainment principles that they are based on.

- The *Spirulina* Infomercials will be identified and analysed in detail as a case study, using as point of departure aspects of cognition and communication relevant to infomercials. One or more personal interviews will be conducted with a spokesperson for the company that imports and distributes the product *Spirulina* in order to determine and describe the hierarchy of information networks that sustains the Infomercial associated with it.

## VALUE OF RESEARCH

By analysing the conceptual principles involved in the encoding of mass communication messages the study will integrate Cognitive Science and Communication Science, and will particularly contribute to our improved understanding of the process of persuasive communication.

## CONCLUSION

In the first section of this chapter I stated three significant research problems regarding South African Infomercials that warranted a study of this nature, namely the need to characterize Infomercials as forms of communication, the need to identify how covert information is used in infomercials, the need to characterise the relationship between Infomercials and advertorials, and the need to identify and describe the hierarchy of information networks that sustain infomercials. In the second section I formulated four objectives that relate to how the identified problems could be resolved by means of research. In the third section I stated the value of such research.

## Chapter 3

### KEY CONCEPTS

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will define the key concepts relating to my research on infomercials. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the main concepts that I will be working with, and which I will use in analysing Infomercials later on. In general the definition of concepts relates to those aspects of cognition and communication that deal with how Infomercials are used as forms of persuasive communication with the intention of getting clients to buy products.

#### COGNITION AND COMMUNICATION

Human beings that are sane, conscious and sober automatically think about the things in the world around them. Because humans are social beings, we need to communicate with other people about the things that we are thinking. The ability to think and to communicate with others about our thoughts therefore is a fundamental characteristic of the human spirit. Communication is impossible without cognition, and cognition is senseless without communication.

#### Cognition

Reed 1996: 4 states that *cognition* is usually simply defined as “the acquisition of knowledge.” He then points out that this general characterisation underplays the fact that human cognition is an extremely complex process that relates to how humans acquire knowledge, how we transform, reduce, elaborate, store (remember), recover (remember) and use knowledge. In this study cognition relates to how the above-mentioned processes relate to advertising as a process of persuasive communication.

#### Emotion

Damasio 1996: 165-204 formulates the *somatic marker hypothesis* to account for people’s emotional reactions to events. According to this hypothesis one’s long-term memory holds not only of the factual contents of an event, but also the emotive state that

one experiences as part of such an event. During pleasant events, pleasing emotive states are experienced, and co-indexed as part of the long-term memories of the events. After experiencing unpleasant events, one associates negative emotions as part of the long-term memories of such events.

In this study the concept *emotion* relates to its role in advertising as form of persuasive communication. Pleasing emotions in the form of humour and patriotism are often used, and less commonly negative emotions such as fear and guilt, in advertisements.

## **Guilt**

*Guilt* is an unpleasant emotion that a person experiences for having done something, or for not having done something that has a negative effect on another person. The person who feels guilty blames herself/ himself for the negative effect that her / his actions or inactions can have on the affected party. Advertisers sometimes use the guilt feeling in an attempt to emotionally coerce recipients of advertising messages into buying products. About a decade ago it was commonly used to sell life insurance to adult males in the South African emerging black middle class, by portraying for instance the sad members of a family, along with the message that a responsible father would make the necessary provisions for his family in case of his untimely death. Due to the ravages of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa, life insurance is not advertised any more. Some agencies however are using the guilt factor to sell funeral policies.

## **Humour**

Humour is a pleasing emotion that is used in advertising to put prospective clients in a good mood in order to more easily persuade them to purchase a product. Humour works on the principle of surprise. When the recipient of the message expects one situation, and another situation unexpectedly presents itself, the recipient experiences a combination of surprise and relief. If a product is associated with feelings of relief or surprise the recipient of the message forms pleasant associations with it. The South African *Cremora* TV advertisement is a typical example. It portrays a scene where a grown Black male is bent forward, peering into a fridge shouting: "Honey, where is the *Cremora*? It's not in the fridge!" A female voice then answers in the distance: "It's not inside, it's on top!" While still peering into the fridge the male figure repeats in a mimicking voice: "It's not inside ..." (and then while shifting his gaze from the inside to the top of the fridge, he spots the *Cremora*

bottle, and his tone of voice changes from mimicking to one of sheepish understanding):  
“It’s on top!”

## **Knowledge**

In this study the concept *knowledge* relates to the fact that people’s level of understanding determines whether they will be able to decode a particular advertisement, and therefore to the fact that producers of Infomercials need to create these forms of advertising with particular target audiences in mind. An Infomercial that will appeal to persons in upper-class communities, will probably not appeal to persons in working-class communities.

## **Memory**

The term *memory* is usually understood to refer to the facts and figures that people remember of previously experienced events. As already shown in a previous paragraph, memory also entails the association of emotive states with the factual contents of events.

Edelman 1989: 109-118 points out that one does not only remember past events, but that you actually also remember the present because incoming sensations evoke long term-memories from your brain during the process of categorisation, which forms the basis of recognizing things.

In the following sections I give more information about the three types of memory that humans have:

### **Sensory store**

According to Sternberg 1998: 263 memory consists of three memory stores, the *sensory store*, the *short-term store* and the *long-term store* that operate in the sequence given here. The sensory store is a fleeting sensory memory that stabilizes sensations for a fraction of a second so that they can be passed on to the short-term memory. Of these three types of memory the sensory store has the smallest capacity for storing information, and has the shortest duration of operation.

### **Short-term Memory**

The type of memory that processes the impulses from the sensory store is the *short-term memory*. It has a larger capacity for retaining impulses than the sensory store, but still

has a modest capacity in comparison with the long-term memory, as well as for the duration of it being active. It stores only between five and seven facts for up to a few seconds. When watching an Infomercial a prospective customer becomes aware of a product when s/he has its attributes established in short-term-memory.

## ***Long-Term-Memory***

According to Sternberg 1998: 263 long-term memory is an information store that differs from the other two forms of memory, the sensory store and the short-term memory because it has no precise limit.

According to Reed 1996: 114 long-term memory is a form of memory that has no capacity-limit as it holds information from minutes to an entire lifetime.

It must be the objective of people who make Infomercials to project the image of the products that they are promoting, in such a way that knowledge of these products becomes entrenched as part of the long-term memory of purchasers, so that their particular products will be recalled in minds as the best examples of that category of product. Before an Infomercial viewer will phone to order a product, go onto the Internet to order it, or physically go to a store that sells it, an emotive memory component such as desire, want or need must be evoked from long-term memory and established as part of conscious awareness in short-term memory. Knowledge of the attributes and functions of the product, associated with the need or desire to own it are crucial elements in a customer's motivation to purchase it.

## **Persuasion**

Brock et al 1994: 2 characterises persuasion as "processes [used] to reconfigure ... minds and hearts." In this definition "minds" metonymically represents all human thinking processes, including values and beliefs, and "hearts" metonymically represents the totality of human emotions and attitudes.

Sternberg 1998: 474 shows that one can change someone else's attitudes "by persuading the person to think differently."

Brock et al 1994 as well as Sternberg 1998 emphasise the fact that the communicator has to appeal to the recipient's capacity for reasoning in order for persuasion to take place.

Persuasion succeeds when one successfully effects a permanent change of attitudes, values and beliefs in a recipient by appealing to her/his capacity for reasoning and by reinforcing one's appeal by establishing constructive trust-related emotions between oneself and the recipient. Persuasion therefore requires equal emphasis of reason and emotion. By contrast successful propaganda, a closely related technique of securing a recipient's compliance, overrides the reasonable capacity of the recipient by strong emphasis of egocentric emotive states such as self-interest, desirability, need for approval, fear of rejection and prestige enhancement.

According to Aubuchon 1997: 26-29 an effective persuader must first become a good communicator. This requires that the good communicator apply two sequential processes, namely the creation of one's message, as well as the interaction with the receiver, while delivering it.

A typical example of a persuasive mass media message is a children's infomercial, where the message attracts the attention the recipients, and influences them to feel that they immediately need to possess the product that is being advertised. The only way for the recipient of the persuasive message to satisfy her/his perceived need is to act on the message and buy the product.

## **Propaganda**

According to Laswell 1995: 13 the term "propaganda" refers to any technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of spoken, written, pictorial or musical representations. He also points out that, given their objectives, political assassinations can justifiably be termed "propaganda of the deed." Laswell then adds that many official acts of legislation and administration can be seen as acts of propaganda, promoting the objectives of the state.

According to Laswell the term first gained general currency when the Roman Catholic Church used it to refer to its dissemination of religious doctrine, but that Marxists and modern revolutionaries use/d the term to refer to the spreading of any type of doctrine, including ideological ones.

Laswell points to an interesting relationship between education and propaganda:



*The inculcation of traditional value attitudes is generally called education, while the term propaganda is reserved for the spreading of subversive, debatable or merely novel attitudes.*

According to Laswell many propaganda institutions exist outside of government with the objective of influencing political and social processes, while governments and corporations in turn use propaganda in international settings to promote themselves when for instance a chief executive, a popular aviator or artist travels abroad to demonstrate national friendship. Laswell distinguishes institutionalised *friendship propaganda*, which paternalistically promotes the objectives or values of the originating group among recipients, *hatred propaganda*, which is aimed at changing the perceptions and attitudes of people regarding third parties, and *prestige propaganda* that promotes the superiority of an individual, a group or an institution.

A typical example of friendship propaganda is the following humorous family planning poster in Figure 1, disseminated in Nigeria by the American agency USAID:

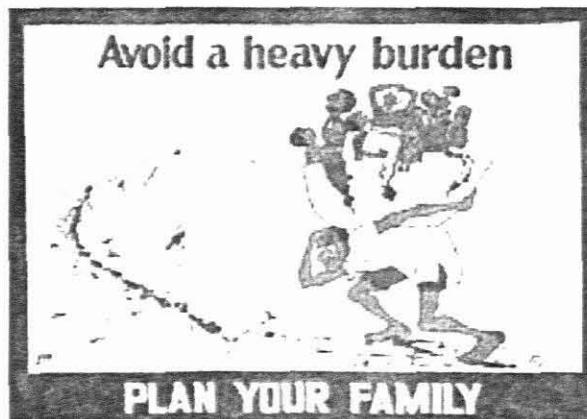


Figure 1: A friendship propaganda poster that promotes the values of the originating group. Image [db.jhuccp.org/dbtw-wpd/images/imagebas/nga131.jpg](http://db.jhuccp.org/dbtw-wpd/images/imagebas/nga131.jpg) at: [www.africa2000.com/PNDX/jhupage.htm](http://www.africa2000.com/PNDX/jhupage.htm)

The originator uses humour in the preceding poster to promote family planning, a typical Western value, because the originator believes that the propagated change in value will enable the recipients to become as prosperous as the cultural group of the originator by adopting its values.

To Laswell's before-mentioned categories can be added *morale boosting* and *demoralisation propaganda*, often used as psychological extensions of physical conflict. These forms of propaganda are aimed at boosting the morale of one's own group or undermining the morale of opponents.

A typical example of morale boosting propaganda is the poster below by the renowned propaganda poster artist Aidan Hughes, entitled "911 Heroes of the Apocalypse," (at [http://www.bruteprop.com/gallery/forsale/show\\_picture.jsp?idx=49](http://www.bruteprop.com/gallery/forsale/show_picture.jsp?idx=49)) The poster in Figure 2 below depicts American paramilitary rescue workers after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center<sup>1</sup> in New York:



Figure 2: A morale boosting propaganda poster by Aidan Hughes, aimed at American citizens after the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York.

It is worth noting the covert nature of the message in the poster with the figures "911" hidden in the in front of the number 11 in the shape of the two twin towers of the World Trade Center.

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<sup>1</sup> "Center" is spelt the American way because it forms part of the name of the American building complex that collapsed on 11 September 2001 after hijackers flew two passenger jetliners into its twin towers.

A typical example of demoralisation propaganda, disseminated with the intention of undermining group morale, is the anti-Nazi cartoon put out by the Allies during the Second World War, in Figure 3:



Figure 3: German soldiers as "unrationed goods" being fed to the flames by Adolph Hitler

This cartoon, above the German caption "unrationed goods," portrays vast numbers of German soldiers, standing at attention with guns over their shoulders, as the limitless supply of toy soldiers, being shovelled into the flames by Adolph Hitler.

Already in 1939 Lee & Lee described propaganda by contrasting it with scientific thinking:

*...opinion expressed for the purpose of influencing actions of individuals or groups... Propaganda thus differs fundamentally from scientific analysis. The propagandist tries to "put something across," good or bad. The scientist does not try to put anything across; he devotes his life to the discovery of new facts and principles. The propagandist seldom wants careful scrutiny and criticism; his object is to bring about a specific action. The scientist, on the other hand, is always prepared for and wants the most careful scrutiny and criticism of his facts and ideas. Science flourishes on criticism. Dangerous propaganda crumbles before it.*

Alfred Lee & Elizabeth Bryant Lee, *The Fine Art of Propaganda*, 1939.

Scientific reasoning, persuasion and propaganda can be arranged as a continuum due to partial characteristics that they share as forms of discourse. In the previous section I showed that persuasion entails an equal emphasis of emotion and reason. Lee & Lee's comparison of the difference between scientific reasoning and propaganda, considered along with the nature of persuasion, leads one to the conclusion that persuasion forms an intermediate phase between scientific reasoning and propaganda. This is due to the fact that scientific reasoning and persuasion both appeal to the recipient's reasoning capacity, while persuasion and propaganda both activate the recipient's emotive responses to the message.

While persuasion and propaganda both involve the recipient's emotive response to the message it should be noted that different sets of emotions are involved. Persuasion exploits constructive trust-related emotions of a recipient while propaganda exploits her/his egocentric emotions.

Because propagandists manipulate every-day symbols to influence ordinary people's perceptions with the ultimate intention of altering their values and beliefs, Laswell characterizes them as opinion shapers and image-makers that control our psyches.

Depending on the degree to which an Infomercial accommodates a recipient's reasoning capacity and the types of emotions that it activates, it can be characterised as employing either persuasive or propagandistic techniques. In the long run Infomercials based on persuasion are more effective than those based on propaganda because they effect long-term changes in recipients' values and beliefs.

# Values and beliefs

Values and beliefs play an important role in how people behave. Wellman 1992: 109 presents a model of belief-desire reasoning. The model is given as Figure 4 below:

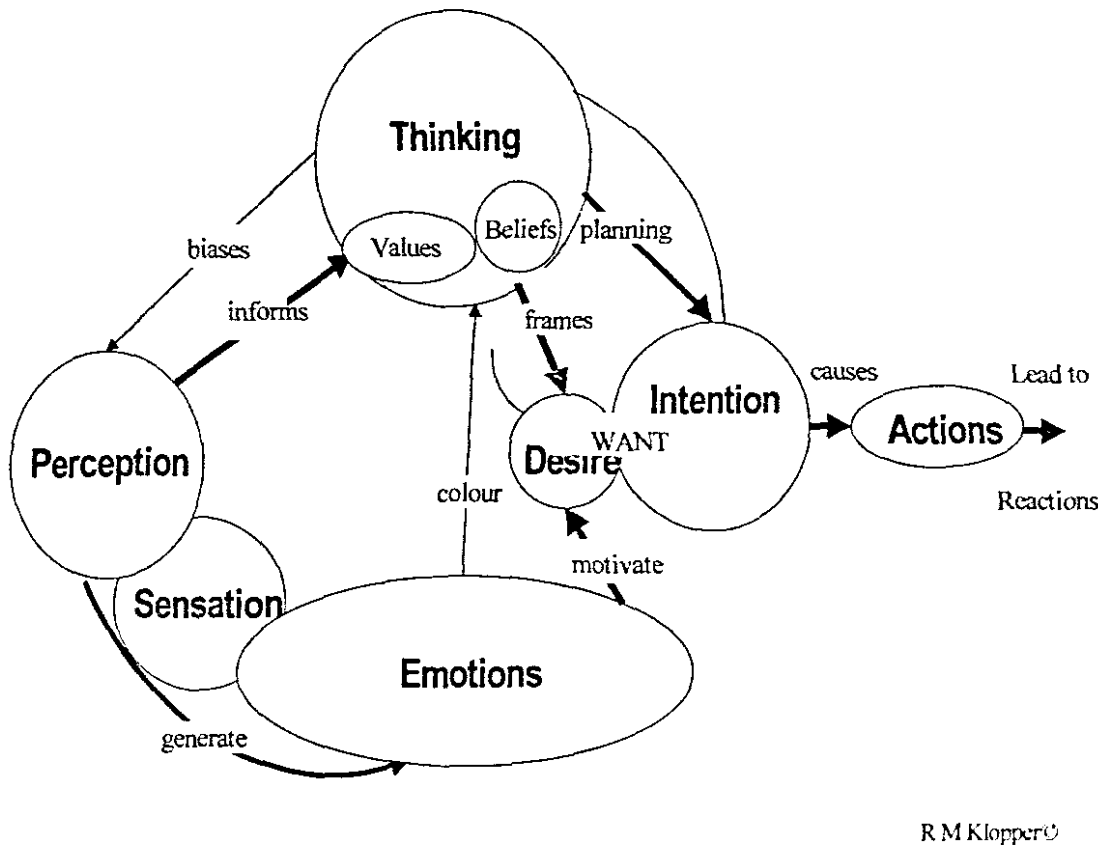


Figure 4: Values and beliefs as part of thinking in commonsense belief-desire reasoning, based on Wellman 1993

According to this model perception forms the basis of thinking, while values and beliefs, as forms of thinking bias perceptions. In other words, people tend to notice things that their values and beliefs make them sensitive to. Wellman’s model also emphasizes that bodily sensations like elation and giddiness result from perception and experience, and that such sensations inform emotion. Emotion in turn colours thinking, and along with thinking, motivates desires and intentions. Intentions cause the actions of people in response to what they perceive:

From this can be seen that perception and emotions play crucial roles in motivating people to buy products by using persuasive techniques to stimulate the desire for such products.

## **COMMUNICATION SCIENCE**

### **A brief outline of communication science**

Although *Communication Science* is a recognized discipline, taught in a number of South African tertiary institutions, standard references like Mersham & Skinner 1999, De Beer et al 1998 and Barker & Gaut 1996 do not define the discipline as a whole. In the absence of any definition I therefore characterize *Communication Science* as the systematic studies of all aspects of communication related to how humans communicate with one another.

A comparison of the above-mentioned references shows the major areas forming communication science discipline to be:

- Language as humanity's major form of communication
- The symbolic nature of communication codes
- The interpretation of communication codes
- Communicating by objectives
- Overcoming the barriers to communication
- The contexts of communication
- Small-group communication
- Intra-personal communication
- Persuasive communication
- Negotiation
- Public communication
- Organizational communication
- Mass communication
- Internet & digital communication

## Communication

According to Barker & Gaut 1996: 5 the communication process is the process in which two or more elements of a system interact in order to achieve a desired goal or outcome.

Graphical representations of the *communication process*, found in standard textbooks (e.g. Mersham & Skinner 1999: 7-10), identify the main elements involved in a communication event, namely the originating / sending communicator, the receiving communicator, the message, the communication codes and the medium through which the message is transmitted. In Figure 5 below I present such a model of the communication process:

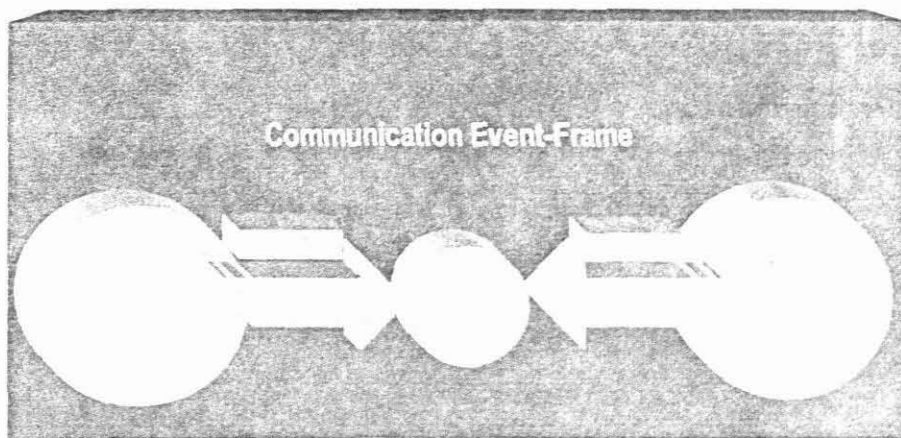


Figure 5: A model of the communication process

## Advertisements

Dunn & Barban 1982: 7 characterise advertising as paid, non-personal communication through various media, done by business firms, non-profit organization and individuals hoping to inform or persuade members of a particular audience to change their attitudes about a product so that they will purchase the product.

An advertisement therefore is a special form of communication that includes a seller as the sending communicator, the advertisement as the message and the recipient as the prospective client. Furthermore, advertisements are transmitted with the specific intention of bringing particular products or services to the attention of recipients as prospective clients, with the intention of persuading them to purchase, hire or rent the product or service that is on offer.

Advertisements can take the form of passive displays on roadside billboards, can be set-up displays in supermarkets, can be text accompanied by graphical illustrations in brochures, or in newspaper and journal advertisements, can be pre-recorded audio advertisements over the radio, can be pre-recorded animated or filmed audiovisual scenes, and finally can be written advertorials, or live, phone-in Infomercials over the radio or television.

## **Infomercials and advertorials**

Infomercials and advertorials are specialised types of advertisements. According to Hawthorne 1997: 2 the term Infomercial refers to any television commercial of at least thirty minutes that is transmitted with the intention of motivating viewers to ask more information about a particular product, or to buy it. The primary characteristic of an Infomercial is that it motivates viewers or listeners to buy a particular product that it builds credibility for.

Infomercials form the focus of this study. In this type of advertisement authority figures present newsworthy information to audiences who are then given the opportunity to phone in and ask questions, or give comments, preferably of a testimonial nature, regarding products that are covertly advertised.

## **Mass communication**

According to Mersham & Skinner 1999:166 the term *mass communication* refers to a form of communication whereby knowledge, thoughts and attitudes are presented to a fairly large, heterogeneous audience in the print media, or by radio and television transmissions. Whereas the sending communicator interprets feedback cues immediately in the case of direct small group communication and public communication, mass communicators are not in direct contact with their audiences and have to rely on indirect forms of feedback, like phone-in programs, competitions or written orders.

Recent news releases indicate that the digital satellite television network DSTV is about to offer a service on some of their channels where you will be able to zero in on an item that is being demonstrated, or on an item of clothing worn by a fashion model, bring information about it on screen, and order it interactively immediately. Phone-in participation in promotional radio programmes and immediate interactive ordering are being developed to overcome the disadvantage of indirect feedback that characterises the mass communication media.



## Persuasive communication

According to Shavitt & Brock 1994: 4 the primary target of persuasion is to change the attitudes and opinions of people. A persuasive communicator achieves her/ his objectives when s/he succeeds in replacing the perceptions and desires of the target audience with perceptions and desires that s/he promote. Granat 1993: 29 says that persuasion takes place when one influences or convinces people to do things according to your will - in the case of Infomercials and advertorials - to buy the products that you are promoting.

## Conversation

### *Direct face-to-face conversation*

In this form of communication, the sending communicator simultaneously uses a wide range of complementary codes to disseminate specific meanings as well as general attitude-forming meanings. The sending communicator namely uses verbal speech sounds as segmental codes to form words with specific meanings like *dog* or *eat*, along with pantomimes,<sup>2</sup> precise gestures of which some can have as specific as those of words. Some pantomimes have a single meaning, such as the victory sign (palm forward with index and middle fingers in V-formation); other pantomimes have multiple meanings such as a wagging index finger that can convey a warning, scolding, or admonition.

At the same time as disseminating codes with specific auditory and gestural meanings, the sending communicator unwittingly emanates suprasegmental verbal codes with non-specific meanings, such as tone of voice, pitch and emphasis, along with nonverbal kinesic visual codes with non-specific meanings such as facial expressions, gaze behaviours, gestures, postures and locomotion. These suprasegmental and kinesic codes are supplemented by nonverbal proxemic codes that relate to culturally defined distance zones that individuals feel comfortable with during public, social, familial and intimate interactions.

Therefore, the sending communicator disseminates meaning-specific codes that are used by the receiving communicator to decode the *intended* meaning of the message. At the same time the sending communicator also *unintentionally* emanates a range of codes that are used by the receiving communicator to form an attitude about the sending communicator and her / his message.

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<sup>2</sup> I deal with pantomimes in greater detail in Chapter 5 where I discuss the nature of visual coding.

## ***Telephonic conversation***

This is a special form of direct verbal communication where the sending and the receiving communicators share the same time frame but different spatial frames because they normally are in different locations.

Furthermore, telephonic conversations differs from face-to-face conversation because the communicators have to completely rely on segmental and suprasegmental auditory codes in the absence of a wide range of visual codes to construct the meaning of the message and to form attitudes about one another.

## **Organisational communication**

According to Mersham & Skinner: 2001: 4 organisational communications is the necessary communication-taking place to achieve the common purpose of an organisation. They further explain that an organisation is a stable system of individuals working together to achieve the common purpose through a hierarchy of ranks and division of labour. It is in the organisation where the importance of communication is clearly noticeable, this I say because there will be no flow of information if there is no communication. Organizational communication includes many varied activities such as giving direction, counselling workers, motivating people and resolving problems within an organization. Organizational communication relies upon the skills found in intra-personal and face-to-face communication as discussed in previous chapters.

When looking at the organizational communication it is clear that communication is the lifeblood of an organization as it permeates all activities in an organization, because through communication the individual is able to understand his/her role within an organization using main elements of communication in the process namely course/sending communicator, channel, medium, signs and symbols and receiving communicator.

The relationships among the members of the organization are stable and it is this structural ability that allows an organization to pursue certain aims and objectives.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I defined the key concepts relating to my research on infomercials. In the first section I looked at the aspects of cognition that relate to persuasive communica-

tion, an important feature of infomercials. I characterized cognition, emotion, guilt, humour, knowledge, memory, and values & beliefs as in this section. In the second section I gave a brief characterization of communication science as a discipline, the nature of Infomercials and advertorials, mass communication and persuasive communication.

## *Chapter 4*

### THE NATURE OF MASS COMMUNICATION

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I will analyse the nature of mass communication show where Infomercials fit into the overall pattern of mass communication.

#### **APPROACHES TO MASS COMMUNICATION**

##### **The essence of mass communication**

According to Williams 1992: 211 people, with the exception of those living in the most primitive societies, are constantly being bombarded with messages from the public media – newspapers, radio, television, billboards, books, films and even the packaging around products. This in essence is the nature of mass communication.

Advertisements form an important component of such messages. Infomercials are specialized types of promotional mass media messages, used by companies to promote their products as “informative” presentations during radio and television transmissions.

##### **The terms “mass communication” and “public communication”**

Williams 1992: 213 states that, although this form of communication takes place in the public domain, he prefers the term “mass communication” to the term “public communication” to the term “public communication” which is sometimes used as its equivalent.

Mersham & Skinner 1999: 131, 166-168 reserve the term “public communication” for instances where an individual communicator directly addresses an audience of some sort, and “mass communication” for forms of communication where communicators use mass media like the print media, radio and television to disseminate messages indirectly to extremely large audiences.

Following Williams and Mersham & Skinner, the term “public communication” will be used in this study to refer to instances where communicators directly address audiences, while the term “mass communication” will be used to refer to forms of communication

where communicators indirectly disseminate messages to extremely large audiences through mass media such as the print media and electronic transmissions over the radio and television.

According to Mersham & Skinner 1999: 215 the term “mass communication” refers to the process whereby information, ideas and attitudes are being delivered to a large and diversified audience by using anything capable of storing and conveying signs and symbols like television, radio, newspapers and magazines.

Because mass communication messages originate within organisations, scripted by teams of originators, professional presenters are needed as mouthpieces to give voice to pre-scripted messages in the mass media.

### **The advantages and disadvantages of mass communication**

According to Williams 1992: 214 mass communication has advantages as well as disadvantages. In this section I will discuss the major advantage as well as three disadvantages of mass communication.

#### ***The major advantage of mass communication: atlas shrunk***

Following Marshall McLuhan’s term “global village” as reported in Barker and Gaut 1996: 341, an important feature of mass communication is that it overcomes the barriers of time and space, where the world is seen as being smaller than before because of advances in mass communication. Thinking about what we have seen previously, and what we are seeing currently, reinforces our perception of the smallness of the world, because close friends can share one another’s joy or sorrow directly, or talk about significant events, taking place in other parts of the world, based on news presented to us over the mass media. I want to illustrate this point by referring to five distant events of which South Africans have become participants due to the fact that the electronic mass media effectively neutralized space-time differences between South Africa and countries abroad:

In 1994 ordinary people in distant villages and major cities all over the world “attended” the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela via televised satellite transmissions of the event, while invited dignitaries had to fly all of the way to attend.

Starting in 1994 South Africans were able to daily “attend” the sensational O.J. Simpson court case in the United States of America for more than a year, during which the African American former sports star, television commentator and actor, was on trial for allegedly having killed his former wife and her lover.

The news that Princess Diana of Britain was fatally injured in car accident in Paris, France on Sunday the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1997 was almost instantly transmitted all over the world by radio and television stations. Her funeral service in Westminster Abbey, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1997, and her subsequent internment at her family’s estate on an Island were both transmitted live around the world.

The funeral of the eminent ANC leader, Govan Mbeki (the late father of current president, Thabo Mbeki) was “attended” by mourners across the country on TV on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2001.

The multiple hijacking of commercial jetliners with passengers aboard in The United States of America on Tuesday the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, and the acts of deliberately crashing them into American landmarks, leading to the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York and the collapse of a section of the Pentagon building in Washington DC, was instantly transmitted over radio and television stations all over the world. Subsequent efforts to rescue victims trapped under tons of rubble, were actually transmitted in real time to viewers all over the world.

### ***Three disadvantages of mass communication***

#### **The absence of a single spokesperson as sending communicator**

Mersham & Skinner 2001: 6 states that the process of mass communication is an inverse of interpersonal communication. One reason for this inverse relationship is that the communicator in mass communication is not a single individual, but a team, which is working together within an organization like a newspaper or a television station to produce and distribute messages to an unknown audience.

#### **The anonymity of mass communication audiences**

Similarly, the receiving communicator during a mass communication event is not a single person that shares the same space-time frame with the sending communicator, but an anonymous collection of individuals at the other end of radios or television sets.

An official from the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) verbally emphasized problems relating to the anonymity of broadcast audiences during a group visit to that organisation in September 2000, as well as the market research that needs to be done to determine listener and viewer profiles, particularly to determine what their preferences are. Although individual viewers and listeners remain faceless, the above-mentioned type of research can reveal the general profiles of persons that are using the mass electronic media during specific times of the day.

In the case of Infomercials there can be two audiences involved, namely a small studio “audience” (who is often made up of persons hired to play the role of an audience during the recording of infomercials), and the real mass audience to whom the message is transmitted, either directly during “hot” (live) transmissions, or during subsequent “cold” transmissions. Whether they are the target of “hot” or “cold” transmissions, the primary audience of Infomercials is therefore made up of the individuals or groups that form the potential purchasers of the products that are being promoted by means of infomercials.

Successful Infomercials depend on knowledge of time-of-day profiles of persons who are watching particular television stations, or who are listening to particular radio stations. Late mornings are for instance a good time for transmitting Infomercials that promote kitchen utensils when housewives are busy preparing meals, while mid-afternoons are better for transmitting Infomercials that promote knowledge enhancement products, because mothers are often encountering problems at that stage with motivating their children to do homework. Late at night is the best time to transmit Infomercials that promote self-image enhancement products when younger viewers and listeners are at home, relaxing in front of the TV, or listening to the radio in the background.

#### **The absence of direct communication feed-back loops**

The essence of communication is that at least two individuals exchange information about a topic of mutual interest. This process of exchange means that communication should preferably be bi-directional in real time, without periods of delay between exchanges. Perhaps the biggest problem with mass communication is that there are now bi-directional feedback loops. Sending communicators assume that their messages are being received and decoded, but generally are unaware of recipients’ responses to their messages, as televisions and radios may be switched off, or viewers and listeners may be preoccupied with something else, be asleep, or too intoxicated to make sense of transmissions.

## **A solution to the problems relating to mass communication**

The only way to resolve the problems of anonymity and diversity is for the communicator to manage such diversity. In the print media – newspapers such as *The Natal Mercury*, or news magazines such as *Time* for instance – use letters columns, which enable readers to post or e-mail their responses to articles on topical events.

In the digital mass media producers display on-screen phone numbers, or presenters periodically announce them in the course of a program, inviting listeners or viewers to phone in live and voice their opinions about the topic under discussion. An example of this is the nightly CNN programme, *Larry King Live*, where international callers phone in to speak to the presenter, Larry King, or to his celebrity guests.

The drive of ordinary people to communicate with others lies behind the popularity of what has locally become known as “talk radio” Local examples of this phenomenon are the extremely popular *Tim Modise Show* on weekday mornings on SAFM, or Monica Farrell’s very popular weekly midmorning phone-in show *Pursuit to Health* on SAFM.

## **Infomercials as mass media messages**

In Chapter 5 I focus on the nature and functions of infomercials. In this section I therefore give a brief, general characterization of this form of advertising.

Infomercials are specialised messages, communicated through the electronic mass media due to the following shared characteristics these media - radio and television. They are effective for the following reasons:

1. They can be multiplied cheaply and quickly, and disseminated widely by using these media;
2. They are easily disseminated via these media;
3. They are disseminated to a potentially large and varied audience, via these media;
4. They are disseminated by businesses that have profitability as their objective, which means that such messages will be cost effective, and that only those mes-



sages that promote profitable products or services will be sustained in the long run.

. It is in the mass communication where the feedback is done telephonically meaning that it does not reach the communicator directly since the audience is separated from the source thus causing the delay.

This is one of the gatekeepers that influence the message in mass communication as according to De Beer et al 1998: 9 as well as emphasis by Ukhozi F.M official, who used radio and television as examples that news media cannot broadcast all the information fed to them by wire services or organization prior to the filtering process so as to determine the items considered as the most news worthy.

Looking at the four important components of mass communication that are film, recording, radio and television then take radio as one of my areas focus, I find out that its success is attributed to its popularity, mobility and portability, also of benefit to small advertisers who cannot afford expensive television commercial.

According to Barker & Gaut 1996: 346 television is the most powerful and influential form of mass media communication. This is because TV programmes are designed to inform, to entertain, to persuade one to change the pre-existing ideas, and to reinforce existing knowledge and beliefs. This makes TV a powerful medium for advertising, including advertising by means of infomercials.

### **Media-buying firms as managers of infomercials**

Some businesses prefer to use the services of a *media-buying firm* to manage the telecasting of their Infomercials because this is more convenient and less expensive than buying airtime directly. Such media-buying firms purchase blocks of time at local television stations in many areas of the United States and then allot appropriate time slots for the Infomercials of their clients.



Figure 6: The "as seen on TV" Infomercial logo

## The as-seen-on-TV logo

American television Infomercials provide telephone numbers as well as Internet website addresses where further information about the products can be obtained, or where products can be ordered online. Such websites often display the as-seen-on-TV

logo on the left.

In South Africa stores that sell Infomercial products often display this logo on them as associative mnemonic trigger to remind customers of the transmitted Infomercial and in so doing promote the sale of such products.

## American online Infomercial yellow pages

Because of the popularity of Infomercials in the United States of America a special online "yellow pages" Infomercial index is available on the Internet for prospective purchasers who have lost or forgotten the contact details for the product that they wish to buy. The website containing the index is known by the following logo:



Figure 7: The USA Infomercial index on the Internet

In South Africa Infomercials are presented on Television as well as over the radio. Radio Infomercials are presented in the form of specialist-advice programmes where listeners get the opportunity to

phone in and ask for solutions to whatever problems they are experiencing regarding the theme under discussion. The specialist advisor will usually present a variety of possible solutions, but will offer the product being promoted as a particularly good way of solving the problem under discussion. When such information is presented as an informative article in the print media it is called an *advertorial*.

Some Infomercials provide toll-free numbers towards the end of the transmission whereby the purchaser can phone to order the product. Other Infomercials provide a discount offer for a limited time. This they do with an intention of spreading the information, through propaganda using our emotions as the most important tool. One is able to detect propaganda by looking at the following propaganda devices, as stated by Jackal 1995: 217-221. "Name calling," which makes us form judgments without examining the evidence. When looking at Felicia Mabuza Suttle glass frames we make judgments that one buys them because s/he has a lot of money and belongs to the high-class group.

The other one is a glittering generality, which make us accept and approve without examining the evidence. This you can see clearly in the mass communication where propagandists identify his or her programmes by use of virtue words. Here the propagandist appeal to our emotions of love, generosity and brotherhood words such as truth, freedom, honour, liberty, social justice, public servant, the right to work, progress and democracy. The example is the truth and reconciliation committee where Archbishop Desmond Tutu was the chairperson.

Propagandists use testimonials to advertise the product, for instance the say after action satisfaction when advertising Lexington, and in order for you to be the top person use Cremora for it is on top.

They also use plain folks to win our confidence more especially political leaders as they appear to be people just like ourselves. During elections candidates use to show their devotions to little children who are the future generation.

Sternberg Robert mentioned the bandwagon as one of the devices to make us follow the crowd to accept propagandists program with the theme everybody is doing it. In commercial they use to say don't throw away your vote because your vote is your word it will make the difference. This is clear that without our emotions propagandists are helpless for they can be able to influence few opinions and few actions.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I analysed the essence of mass communication, including how mass communication relates to public communication. I discussed the major advantage and three disadvantages of mass communication, and showed where Infomercials fit into the overall pattern of mass communication. The three disadvantages that I discussed are: the absence of a single spokesperson as a sending communicator, the anonymity of audiences, and the absence of direct communication feedback loops in infomercials. I also discussed possible solutions to the problems relating to mass communication, and Infomercials as mass media messages. Some of these solutions are these of toll free numbers at the end of infomercials, using the services of media-buying firms to manage the telecasting of infomercials, and finally, the use of the as-seen-on-TV logo on products as mnemonic stimulus for selling them in participating outlets.

## THE COMMUNICATION CODES THAT ARE USED IN INFOMERCIALS

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will discuss the communication codes that humans use to encode and decode communicated messages. I will outline a variety of multi-sensory codes, but will focus on the codes that are predominantly used in infomercials.

### COMMUNICATION CODES

Mersham & Skinner 1999: 17 refer to communication codes as the collection of related signs, symbols and rules regulating their usage in communication. In the construction of both advertorials and Infomercials codes are of vital importance. This is because the sending communicator uses such codes to encode the message and because the receiving communicator uses them to decode the message.

According to Mersham & Skinner 1999: 18 encoding is the activity required to transform ideas into observable sensory signs. In order to understand the complex ways in which humans employ communication codes, one has to take the general communication model, shown in Figure 8, as point of departure:

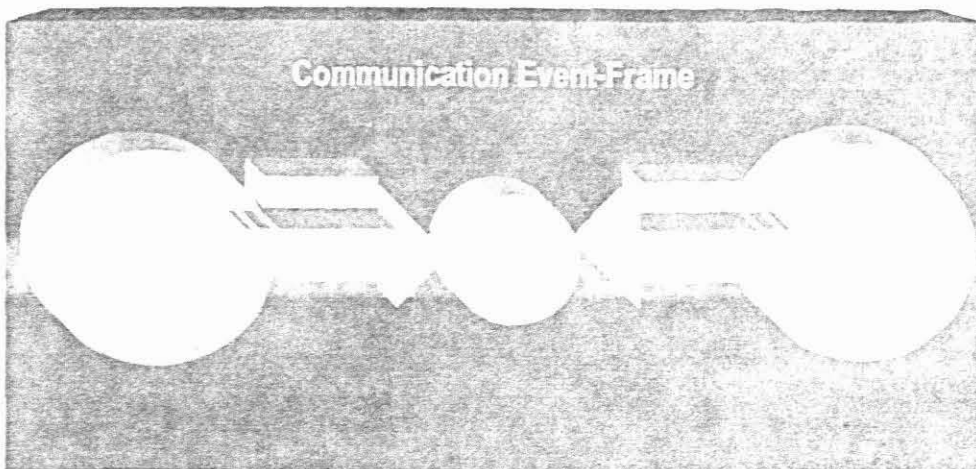


Figure 8: The general communication model

From above-mentioned model one can deduce that the sending communicator has to encode her/his message by using a combination of codes that can be decoded by the various human senses. Because encoded messages have to be decoded by the senses of the receiving communicator they must be of a visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory or tactile nature.

Because I primarily focus on the use of visual and auditory codes in Infomercials and advertorials in this chapter, I will briefly outline the nature of olfactory, gustatory or tactile coding before proceeding to the former types of coding.

### **Olfactory, Gustatory and Tactile Codes**

Olfactory codes are aromas that advertisers employ to promote their products. When one walks past a bakery and encounters the smell of freshly baked bread, the bakery is indirectly using the aroma of the bread to advertise their products. Examples of the direct, intentional use of aromas to promote products are samples of coffee, tea, and food in preparation, perfumes, detergents that are handed out to clients in shopping centres.

Examples of the commercial enlistment of gustatory coding for the purposes of promoting sales would be the so-called taste test samples of foods like grilled meat, yoghurt and fruit juices that are offered in small containers to clients in by product promoters in supermarkets.

Both olfactory and gustatory codes are chemical by nature, namely the volatile biochemicals and plant chemicals that register on human sense receptors as aromas when encountered, and as tastes when consumed.

Tactile codes register as sensations of smoothness, pressure, pain, ticklishness, and so forth on sensors beneath the skin, within muscles and where muscles are attached to skeletal bones. Examples of these would be the smooth texture of yoghurt on one's tongue or between your fingers, the brittle texture of hard cheeses, potato crisps or nuts, or the soft touch of silken and satiny clothing to the skin.

## Visual codes

According to Mersham & Skinner 1999: 19-37, in its broadest sense visual codes encompass kinesic codes, proxemic codes, graphic codes, colour codes, layout interrelationships, three-dimensional models, objects in the real world, and possessions.

Because I am focusing on the visual codes that are used in infomercials, I am limiting my discussion of visual codes to those involved in the making of infomercials. They are kinesics, the shape and colours of graphics, including text, shades of colour, photographs, layout features such as shape, placing, spacing and orientation, illustrations and three-dimensional modular representations. Kinesic codes can be characterised as spontaneous performance codes, and the rest of the codes as message construction codes.

### **Spontaneous performance visual codes**

#### **Kinesic communication codes**

Kinesic communication codes entered the domain of popular public perception in the early nineteen eighties when Allan Pease collectively referred to them with the term *body language*. I am utilising Pease 1993 and Mersham and Skinner 1999 as sources for this discussion.

Kinesics includes facial expressions, gaze behaviour, gestures, posture and locomotion used during face-to-face conversation. These codes, which are nonverbal communication codes, operate in complementary blends during conversation.

#### ***Facial Expressions***

In spite of their popularisation by Pease in the early nineteen eighties the operation of kinesic coding during interpersonal communication has only recently been studied systematically, and therefore is still poorly understood. In a 1988 SABC TV Science programme, titled "The human face," broadcast over the Discovery channel of Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) in March of 2001, one nonverbal communication expert stated that the human face conveys up to 10,000 meaningful expressions, and that the combination of the different forms of nonverbal communication is so complex that a grammar of nonverbal communication, similar to the grammar of human language, can be discerned.

According to the same programme people decode others' facial expressions to ascertain others' attitudes towards both them and the messages that they are communicating.

One of the participants, Paul Ekman, referred to his research (Ekman 1996, 1997a, 1997b), according to which telltale fleeting facial expressions give away masking behaviour (attempts to mislead fellow communicators). Examples of such give-aways are when people avert their eyes upward, or when they close their eyes for periods longer than a normal blink, when they are responding to questions about the truthfulness of a previous statement that they had made, or of previous behaviour.

### *Gestures*

According to Mersham & Skinner 1999: 21 gestures refer to movement of head, shoulders, arms, legs and other parts of the body. It therefore is in this form of communication where the entire body is used to communicate.

The rubbing of hands for instance is used to express expectation. If a waitress or waiter in a restaurant rubs her/ his hands together at the end of the meal when s/he enquires whether you want anything else, this gesture is a covert sign that s/he is expecting a tip.

Gestures are more culturally bound than facial expressions. In Western culture a brief strong one-handed grip is a norm for a handshake. In South African Black cultures a handshake usually incorporates a right-handed sequential triple grip that starts by grasping one another's hand palms, proceeds to a mutual thumb grip with the fingers and ends in the original hand palm grip. According to Pease 1992: 36 there are a variety of other individualistic, personality signalling hand grips, among them the so-called glove grip, where a participant enthusiastically envelops the other ones hand with both her/ his hands to signify approval, friendliness or closeness.

### *Pantomimes*

Ross 1997 distinguishes two forms of kinesic communication, namely pantomime and gestures. According to Ross pantomime is consciously used to convey specific semantic information, while gestures, more generalised body movements, are used to colour, emphasize, and embellish speech.

The victory sign, the index finger and the one next to it raised palm forward, is an example of pantomime. By contrast, folding one's arms while listening to a speaker could be a subconscious gesture of scepticism about what is being said. Tapping one's foot could

be a subconscious gesture of impatience. Most spontaneous kinesic activity associated with discourse usually blends gestures and pantomime into consecutive movements.

*Multiple meanings of pantomimes and gestures*

Most kinesic codes are open to multiple interpretations. Frowning and smiling are examples of universal kinesic codes that are open to multiple interpretations. Just as word like *can*<sup>3</sup> and *book*<sup>4</sup> have multiple meanings, so pantomimes have multiple meanings as shown in Figure 9 below:

<b>Pantomimes</b>	<b>Their multiple meanings</b>
Wagging index finger	Warning, scolding, admonition
A raised clenched fist	Expression of power
Shaking clenched fist	Threat of physical violence
Shaking the head from side to side	Denial of permission, disapproval, unwillingness

Figure 9: Table of typical pantomimes and their meanings

Gestures, on the other hand, have multiple non-specific meanings. If a person frowns during conversation it may indicate puzzlement, disagreement with the message content, or disapproval of the messenger, whereas a smile may indicate friendliness towards the messenger, amusement with the message or messenger, understanding of the message, agreement with the message content, or encouragement to continue.

A smile, though, may also signify nervousness, smugness or self-justification, depending on the communication situation. It should therefore be taken into consideration that identical facial expressions might have widely different meanings under different circumstances.

<sup>3</sup> *Can 1*: the knowledge and skills needed to do something; *Can 2* The process of pre-sealing uncooked perishable food into a metal can and then cooking its contents in order to preserve it; *Can 3* A pre-sealed metal container used to cook and store perishable food in to preserve it.

<sup>4</sup> *Book 1*: a man-made object, usually consisting of a sizable number of printed copies, consisting of text and/or graphics that focus on a particular theme, and which is organized into chapters, subsections, paragraphs and sentences; *Book 2*: The act of prearranging with an owner or her/his agent access to a venue at a predetermined time.



## **Gaze behaviour**

According to Mersham & Skinner 1999: 20 this form of communication plays an important role in face-to-face communication because it may well be the most revealing and accurate of all human communication signals. This is due to the fact that the pupils of ones eyes involuntary expand or contract as the person's mood and attitudes change.

Gaze behaviour is especially important during intercultural communication. Eye contact for instance signals honesty and dependability in Western culture, but signals insubordination and disrespect in traditional Nguni culture.

## **Posture**

According to Mersham & Skinner 1999: 23: posture signifies the general attitude of a person when sitting, standing, lying down or moving about. It is from posture that one is able to deduce whether a person is tense, relaxed, rushed, weary or injured during face-to-face conversation.

A receiving communicator who uses her /his hand to support her /his head signals boredom with what is being communicated.

Folded arms during a conversation or a public speech could signify a negative attitude towards the message. A receiving communicator can signify that s/he is making a positive decision by stroking the chin.

People, who wear glasses or smoke, may display some alternative decision-making contemplative gestures. A receiving communicator who wears glasses may remove her/his glasses, and may even put one temple of the frame in her/his mouth instead of using the chin stroking gesture when making a decision. A smoker may put a lit or unlit pipe or cigarette in her/his mouth when contemplating a decision.

## **Locomotion**

Locomotion (body movement) is an important form of nonverbal communication during a face-to-face conversation. Mersham & Skinner 1999: 26 describe locomotion as the movement of the body from one geographical position to another. It is this code that displays a particular state of mind or membership of a particular culture/subculture. The way in which a person walks from one place to another, or paces to and fro, for example

reveal a person's frame of mind and mood, be it excitement, eagerness, tiredness, illness despondency or happiness.

Locomotion however does not have to entail moving from one spot to another. Excited children can jump up and down on the same spot. So could be the case with the toyi-toyi action where demonstrators acting in unison could be performing the alternating characteristic double skipping leg action while stationary, or while moving from one place to another.

### ***Proxemic communication codes***

According to Mersham & Skinner 1999: 26 Proxemics can be defined as the individual's structuring of space around him/her. Proxemics is divided into four zones within which a person normally interacts with others; those are the intimate, personal, social and public zones.

#### **The intimate zone**

This zone may be divided into two sub-zones, which are near-intimate zone that extends from actual physical contact up to a distance of more or less 15centimeters.This is normally kept for dating, intimate friends, parents and children. The far intimate zone extends from about 15 centimetres up to 45 centimetres. This is clearly seen in crowded buses, taxis or lifts where commuters signal discomfort with invasion their personal body spaces by staring at the roof, the wall, etc. .

#### **The personal zone**

The personal zone has a near personal sub-zone extending from 45 centimetres to about 75 centimetres and a far personal sub-zone that extends from approximately 75 centimetres up to approximately 1,2 metres.

#### **The social zone**

The social zone has the near social sub-zone, which is approximately 1,2 metres up to 2,1 metres. It is reserved for interactions that are not influenced by personal feelings. This usually represents the distance seen between the employer and the employee. The far social sub-zone lies approximately between 2,1 and 3,3 metres and is normally reserved for formal businesses.

## **Message construction by visual communication codes**

### **Shapes**

#### **Letter shapes**

The concept of shape relates to the most basic (fundamental) configuration of visual elements that can be discerned to identify any visual coding symbol. This configuration of the elements that together constitute a visual coding symbol can be easily demonstrated by referring to the basic shapes of letters of the Roman alphabet. All letters consist of particular combinations of horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines, which are often curved where they intercept with one another Reed 1996:27 shows that due to partial similarities in their shapes the capital letters CGPREFMNW can be subcategorised into the sets CGPR and EFMNW, and further sub-subcategorised into sets CG, PR, EF, MNW, with MNW being further sub-sub-subcategorisable as sets MN and W.

A comparison of sets CGPR and EFMNW shows that the letters of the first set all have curved shapes in contrast with the letters in the latter set that all have straight lines. A comparison of CG and PR shows that C and G both have left-sided large curves, while P and R have right-sided small curves. A comparison of letters E and F with M, N and W shows that E and F are composed of a left-most vertical line augmented by horizontal lines, while M, N and W incorporate vertical and diagonal lines. M and N each consist of two vertical lines joined by two downward sloping diagonal lines that intercept at the bottom of the letter in the case of M, and one vertical line sloping downward from right to left, joining two parallel vertical lines in the case of N.

A number of conclusions can be made from the above-mentioned analysis of letters as visual coding symbols:

A visual coding symbol is made up of a configuration of code features that, perceived as a gestalt, distinguish the symbol as a unique entity within its set of code symbols;

Visual code features are straight and curved lines that intercept one another in various orientations to form the identifying configuration of the symbol;

A visual image that is recognised as a symbol is conceptually foregrounded in relation to co-symbols in its coding set;

There are degrees of similarity and difference between the symbols of a set;

There has to be at least one distinctive feature between any two symbols in a set;

A message is encoded by combining coding symbols in particular sequences to form more complex symbols;

Complex symbols used in complex patterned sequences communicate knowledge about the existence of things, of processes of change, and of interactions between things in real or imaginary events;

I have intentionally given the before-mentioned explicit and rather cumbersome analysis of the shape of letters in order to make the point that the shape features of graphical codes conceptually operate in the background during message coding, while the interpretation of the meaning of the message holds our attention in the foreground. That this is the case, is borne out by the fact that until reaching the previous page of my thesis the reader most probably did not consciously concentrate on the shapes of the letters used to form the words that have been read, but on their meanings instead.

I want to emphasise that the code-differentiating characteristics of Roman letters is entailed in the before-mentioned configurations of lines, and that all further embellishments, like the thickness of lines, their colour and their relative orientations constitute stylistic variations to the basic design, employed to facilitate a particular mood among readers.

### **Stylistic embellishments of letter shapes**

Stylistic embellishments do not alter the fundamental coding functions of writing symbols, but enhance the reading process, and can help set the mood of the document. When systematic alterations are imposed on the basic design features of letters one creates different font styles in the Roman alphabet. Such font styles, of which I am providing a number of examples in 16-point size, subconsciously affect the mood (emotional attitude) of the reader while s/he is consciously decoding the conceptual content of the message:

Arial, Benguiat, **Broadway**, Huxlee vertical, Latin Wide, Marriage, Times New Roman, Viking and Westminster.

Size is yet another aspect of symbol design features that affects the reading process as can be seen from:

Times New Roman 6 point and Times New Roman 22 point.

The mood-setting function of print size can be seen in admonitions to always read the small print in legal documents—an allusion to public suspicion that lawyers and financial institutions tend to hide potentially disadvantageous features of contracts towards the end of documents in print that is hard to read.

Orientation is also important in Roman alphabetical codes. While left-to-right horizontal writing is the default direction, other orientations can also be used as shown in Figure 10 below:

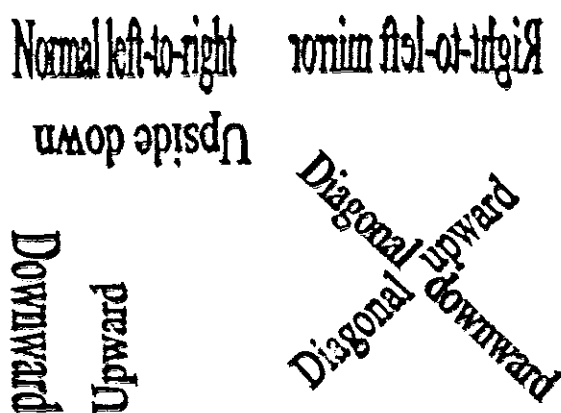
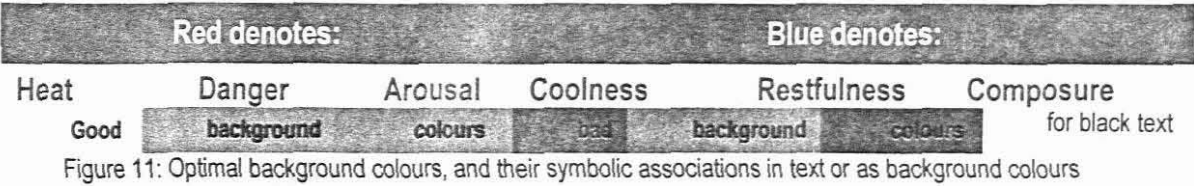


Figure 10: Different recognisable orientations of the Latin script

The colours of the letters themselves, or of the background shades against which they are projected, or the creation of 3-dimensional illusionary letter affects, not only affect readability, but are also used with mood altering effects as shown in Figure 11:



The illusion of three-dimensionality can be achieved in text by adding the element of depth to the two-dimensional elements of height and width, and by adding shadow behind the text as shown in Figure 12 below:



Figure 12: Creating 3-D effect in text by adding depth and shadow

### The orientation and configuration of elements in figural shapes

According to Robert 1997 the symmetric contours of fundamental shapes, such as circles, rectangles, triangles, etc. and their configuration (orientation and spacing) in relation to one another form the crucial basic elements in graphical representations.



The orientation of such fundamental shapes can influence how we interpret them. One triangle on top of another plausibly evokes the image of an hourglass, while two inward pointing triangles in contact are easily interpreted either as a bow tie or a butterfly:



Robert terms the configuration of such fundamental shapes image schemas. In the process constructing such image schemas the human brain associates them with concepts evoked in the mind of the interpreter—the process of message generation in the communication process.

How the human brain provides multiple cognitive contents for graphical images can be seen from the following graphical image that one interprets either as two inward pointing white faces in profile, or as a black chalice, depending on which figure is profiled (foregrounded) in one's mind during message generation as shown in Figure 13:

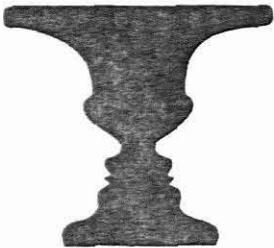


Figure 13: The brain interprets the above contours either as white faces in profile or as a black chalice

In a discussion of prototypical conceptual categories and prototypical figures Eco 2000:191-199 shows that simple three-dimensional stick figure shapes like the ones in Figure 14 below, can be used to represent prototypical figures, namely figures that are well-known to humans because we regularly interact with them, or observe them on a daily basis:

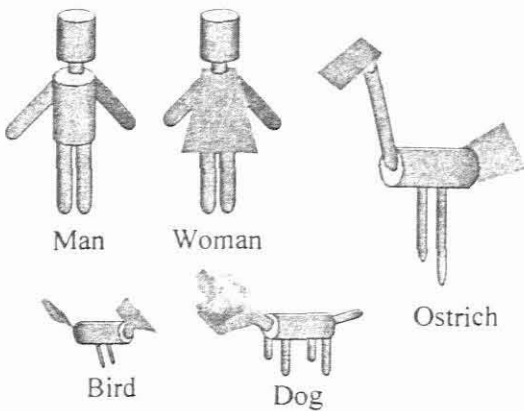


Figure 14: Prototypical figures discernable by the shapes and configurations of their component parts

Such shapes are recognisable as prototypical figures because their component parts have certain lengths and orientations, and are set at particular distances from one another. On the leftmost part of figure 15 below, the component parts of the dog (from figure 14 above) have been kept in their same orientations, but were randomised and spread at non-optimal distances for recognition from one another. On the rightmost part the elements have also been reconfigured in different sequences, but at optimal distances for recognising shapes. In both instances the dog is not recognisable anymore.

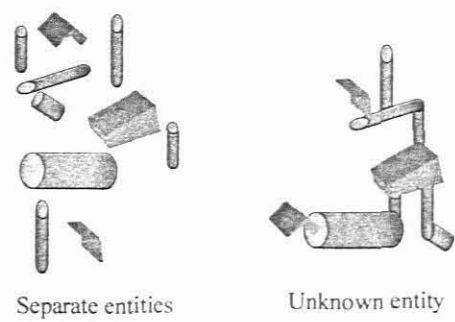


Figure 15: The importance of configuration in the recognition of prototypical shapes

The images on the left remain separate entities in the mind of the interpreter. The images on the right are perceived as a single enigmatic entity, something that could be an unknown implement, or a work of modern art perhaps.

**Colour, hue and texture**

Colour, hue, texture also play important conceptual roles when one interprets graphical shapes as can be seen from the representations in Figure 16:

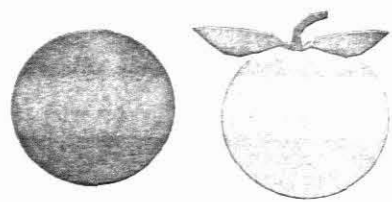


Figure 16: Images of a blue orb and a citrus fruit using two circles with the same circumference



The same circle serves as the basic image schema (image template) for the above two graphical images. The leftmost object is generically perceived as a dark blue orb with a highly reflective surface. More specific interpretations of the generic image could be: a glass marble, a coloured metal ball, a shiny hard sweet, or a glazed ceramic ball. The second graphical image is also generically perceived as a citrus fruit due to its colouring, accompanying images of a stem and two leaves and the suggestion of a slightly irregular surface: an orange, a mandarin, a clementine or a minneola.

## Message construction by auditory communication codes

Auditory codes, also known as acoustic codes, can consist of any sounds that are audible to the human ear. The two primary auditory code systems are human vocal sounds and any conventional sounds generated by humans with the intention of communicating, or of enhancing the communication process. Musical notation and Morse code form part of such conventional coding systems that are expressed in auditory ways.

Human vocal sounds are used for communication during speech and song. Speech as well as song has a segmental aspect as well as a suprasegmental aspect. The segmental aspect relates to the particular discrete speech sounds that sending communicators combine to form word labels, and that receiving communicators use as prompts to retrieve specific word meanings from their minds. Speech sounds that distinguish word meanings (such as *b*, *c* and *r* in *bat*, *cat* and *rat*) are known as *phonemes*, while non-distinctive speech sounds are known as *allophones* (Lass 1991: 18)

### Suprasegmental auditory codes

The suprasegmental aspect of speech relates to non-phonemic auditory communication cues that communicators use to colour the specific meanings of words. According to Lass 1991: 17 communicants used such suprasegmental speech elements as indexical codes to retrieve speaker-characteristics. Such indexical codes include vocal features such as rising or falling tone of voice, stress, pitch, emphasis and relative length, all of which enable a listener to form attitudes and opinions regarding a speaker's regional, ethnic or social dialect membership, age, gender, mood and sexual orientation.

In general a rising pitch, indicated here by the symbol  $\nearrow$ , indicates incompleteness, while a falling pitch, indicated here by the symbol  $\searrow$ , signals finality or acceptance as shown in Figure 17:

<b>Rising tone of voice</b>	<b>Falling tone of voice</b>
Request: ↗ Help me, ↗ please?	Demand: ↘ Help me!
Looking for someone: “↗ John!”	Scolding someone: “↘ John!”
More information is needed: “↗ Yes?”	Offer accepted: “↘ Yes!”

Figure 17: Signalling incompleteness and finality with rising and falling pitch

Phonemes as segmental auditory codes

Lass 1991: 94 divides phonemes into two basic categories, namely *vowels* and *consonants*.

Vowels

English vowels are voiced phonemes, articulated on a continuous outgoing pulmonic air stream, with the vocal chords vibrating, and with the vocal tract wide open. High, middle or low vowels are articulated as the tongue is raised or lowered in the mouth. Front, middle or back vowels are articulated as the tongue is moved forwards or backwards in the mouth. The cardinal vowels of English are shown in Figure 18 below:

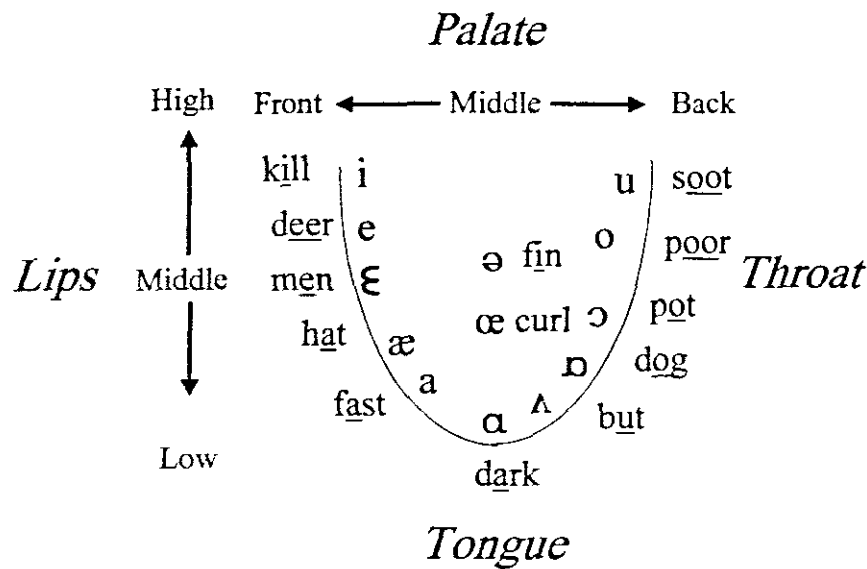


Figure 18: English cardinal vowels, adapted from Lass 1991

Apart from the above-mentioned single vowels, termed *monophthongs*, there are also double vowel clusters in English that are known as *diphthongs*. Examples of diphthongs are: *like* [laɪk] and *feud* [fiud].

**Consonants**

As with vowels, consonants are also pronounced on an outgoing pulmonic air stream, but with the vocal tract in greater degrees of constriction than is the case with vowels. While all vowels are voiced, about half of the consonants are unvoiced. The primary consonants of English are given in Figure 19 below.

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Back</u>
Semi-vowels	w	j	h <u>was</u> , <u>year</u> , <u>hand</u>
Oral sonorants		r	l <u>row</u> , <u>low</u>
Nasal sonorants	m	n	ŋ <u>me</u> , <u>no</u> , <u>long</u>
Voiced stops	b	d	g <u>be</u> , <u>dog</u> , <u>go</u>
Voiceless stops	p	t	k <u>post</u> , <u>dog</u> , <u>go</u>
Voiced fricatives	v	z	<u>very</u> , <u>plea<u>s</u>e</u>
Voiceless fricatives	f	s	<u>far</u> , <u>sing</u>
Voiceless affricates	{	θ	<u>th</u> ing
		ʃ	<u>s</u> ure
Voiced affricates	{	ð	<u>th</u> is
		ʒ	<u>plea<u>s</u>ure</u>

Figure 19: English consonants, adapted from Lass 1991

The semi-vowels [w], [j] and [h] are articulated when the outgoing air stream is terminated without the vocal tract being constricted. Like vowels, all three the semi-vowels are voiced, although [h] is often articulated unvoiced in words like *hat* and *hand*.

All sonorants are voiced. The oral sonorants [r] and [l] are pronounced when the outgoing air stream is partially restricted in the mouth. The nasal sonorants [m], [n] and [ŋ] are articulated when the outgoing air stream is terminated in the front, middle or back of the mouth, but permitted to flow out freely through the nasal passage.

The voiced stops [b], [d] and [g] and the voiceless stops [p], [t] and [k] are articulated when the outgoing air stream is completely terminated in the front, middle or back of the mouth.

The voiced fricatives [v] and [z] and the voiceless fricatives [f] and [s] are pronounced when the outgoing air stream is moderately constricted in the mouth.

The voiceless affricates [θ] and [ʃ] and the voiced affricates [ð] and [ʒ] are articulated when the outgoing air stream is severely constricted in the mouth.

When two consonants are combined they form a double consonant cluster as in *speak* or *halt*. When three consonants are combined they form a triple consonant cluster as in *streak* or *faults*.

### ***Phonotactics***

The study of the patterns of which phonemes can be combined to form word labels—the “permissible strings of phonemes” according to Lass 1991: 21—is known as *Phonotactics*. Examples of phonotactic patterns are that vowels form the nuclei of syllables, as in *cat*, that vowels can form syllables on their own, as in *a man* or *oh no*, and that in consonant clusters consisting of stops and sonorants or fricatives and sonorants, the sonorants will always be articulated closest to vowels as in *sneak* and *blunt*.

### **The interrelationship between suprasegmental and segmental communication codes**

During verbal communication the sending communicator intentionally disseminates speech codes and at the same time unintentionally emanates suprasegmental indexical codes. While the receiving communicator uses the phonemes to consciously (intentionally) construct the meaning of the words of the sending communicator, s/he at the same time subconsciously uses the suprasegmental indexical codes of the sending communicator to form an attitude towards what is being said.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I discussed the nonverbal and verbal codes that communicators use to encode and decode messages, particularly emphasising those codes that are used in informercials. After dealing briefly with the nature of olfactory, gustatory and tactile codes I

gave more comprehensive analyses of visual and auditory codes because they play important roles in the construction of infomercials.

I showed how shape, configuration, stylistic embellishment, relative size, orientation, colour, hue and texture contribute to both written coding and figural visual coding.

I showed how facial expression and complementary blends of pantomime and gesture contribute to kinesic coding.

After giving an overview of vowels and consonants as segmental auditory codes I showed how the simultaneous transmission of a sending communicator's suprasegmental and segmental auditory codes prompt the receiving communicator to intentionally decode the actual message and to at the same time subconsciously form an attitude regarding the sender and her/his message.

In the next chapter I will give a general characterisation of South African Infomercials and of the coding strategies that they follow to enhance the persuasive impact of their messages.

## *Chapter 6*

### **SOUTH AFRICAN INFOMERCIALS - A GENERAL CHARACTERISATION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I will briefly outline the production stages of a typical infomercial, give a characterisation of Infomercials as intended forms of persuasive communication. Thereafter I will give a general characterisation of the Infomercials that are transmitted over South African TV channels, and analyse one infomercial, the Clientèle Life Infomercial as a case study.

#### **INFOMERCIAL PRODUCTION**

A typical TV Infomercial has gone through several stages of development by the time that it is seen by viewers on TV. A team of writers often script it. If it is a new Infomercial a cast has to be hired via a casting agency that has prospective actors and cast members on their books. A film set has to be built and thereafter maintained at the venue of the production company. Production begins when the Infomercial is rehearsed on set under the watchful eye of a director. The director, the cast, cameramen, sound and lighting engineers, and stagehands are all involved during the filming of the infomercial. The filming process itself can take a number of days or weeks, and the editing process a number of weeks.

If one takes the communication model of a sending communicator, a message and a receiving communicator as point of departure, it is clear that the whole team—from the scriptwriter to the stage hands, as well as the company that has commissioned the infomercial—makes up the sending communicator. The Infomercial itself would be the persuasive message, and the TV viewers the receiving communicator.

#### **SOUTH AFRICAN INFOMERCIALS AS FORMS OF DIRECT MARKETING**

According to Chen 1995: direct marketing is the business function that identifies customer needs and wants, that determines in which target markets the organisation can best sell its products, that designs and manufactures or sources appropriate products, services,

and programs to serve these markets, and that promotes these products directly to customers, with ways of ordering, payment and delivery that are the most convenient for the customer.

In his insightful analysis of telemarketing as a form of direct marketing Chen 1995: <http://www.ksi.edu/people/students/charliechen/charthesis/char00.html> concludes: “Marketing is not like what it used to be.” Chen argues that in order to face drastically competitive marketing, business firms in the USA seek a marketing method of low-cost and high-effectiveness to get ahead in the difficult marketing environment. Chen’s observation is equally valid for South African marketers.

According to Chen changes in markets, in marketing technology, in distribution and in the forms of communication employed during direct marketing have worked like earthquakes to fold and shift hallowed assumptions about what works in direct marketing and what does not. In the process some forms of direct marketing have been buried, others have been elevated, and entirely new approaches to direct marketing have arisen.

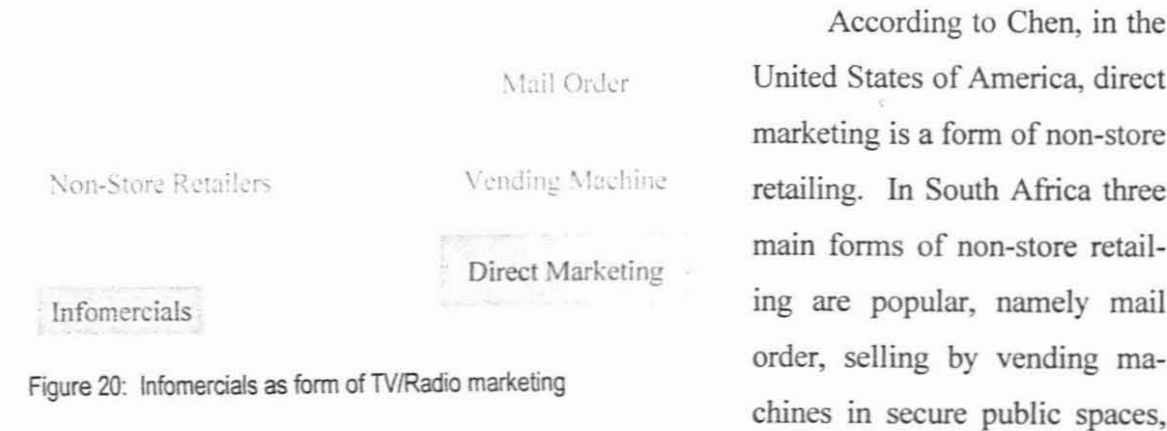


Figure 20: Infomercials as form of TV/Radio marketing and direct marketing as represented in Figure 20 above:

One of the increasingly popular methods of direct marketing in South Africa is the infomercial. The success of Infomercials is partly due to the fact that Infomercial advertisers are constantly adapting this form of direct marketing to changing local market conditions. A second reason is the convenience of this form of marketing for potential clients. A third reason for the success of particularly South African TV Infomercials is the high technical standards of production that are maintained and the fact that household names, particularly among White and Indian viewers, are used as presenters or as background voices. Examples of these are the former TV newsreaders Adrian Steed and Ellen Erasmus Mor-

ton, and the former TV sportscaster, David Bailey who respectively promote insurance products under the brand names *Clientèle Life* and *Outsurance*, and the consumer newspaper and TV consumer journalist, Isabel Jones, who promotes various Verimark products, and finally the former TV newsreader Colin Fluxman who does background voice promoting, mainly in Glomail infomercials.

**SOUTH AFRICAN INFOMERCIALS AS PART OF DIRECT MARKETING MULTI-SELLING CHANNELS**

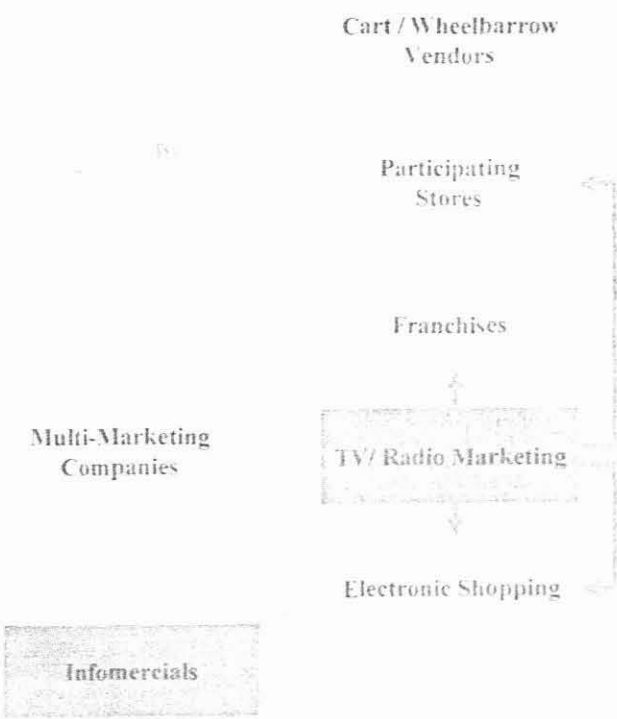


Figure 21: South African Infomercial companies using multi-marketing strategies

Whichever of the multi-marketing outlets a purchaser utilises, the persuasive impetus for the sale derives directly from the infomercial, which is transmitted on TV or on radio. This is shown in Figure 21 above.

**INFOMERCIALS AS A CUSTOMER PREFERENCE OVER TELEMARKETING IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In contrast with the USA telemarketing (the direct selling of products by using telephones to contact potential customers) is not very popular in South Africa. Telephone owners occasionally receive phone calls from telemarketing salespersons that are promot-



ing time-share products or dining out club memberships. Clothing stores occasionally send SMS messages to cell phone owners to promote discount sales. Telemarketing however seems to be a struggling, if not a dying, form of direct marketing in South Africa.

One of the reasons why Infomercials may be a more acceptable method of direct marketing in South Africa than telemarketing is that telemarketing attempts to sell by phone which could be considered by people as an invasion of privacy, while selling by Infomercials is not, due to the fact that Infomercial clients watch Infomercials voluntarily at times of their choice.

The traditional forms of advertising in South Africa are newspaper and brochure advertisements, knock-and-drop pamphlets, leaflets inserted into district newspapers and on-the-premise sale displays in shop windows. Increasingly these forms of advertising are only effective if the shop forms part of a one-stop shopping experience in a shopping mall. At such venues prices however tend to be high because shop rentals tend to be high. A more affordable alternative is direct marketing where the customer does not have to go to the seller because the seller directly advertises in the customer's post-box, and directly delivers to the customer.

Although Infomercial marketing is far more expensive than post-box marketing, it has many benefits for both marketers and consumers. Firstly, post-box marketing tends to be considered to be just another form of junk mail, in contrast with TV and radio Infomercials that recipients are exposed to voluntarily. Secondly, consumers appreciate the speed, and convenience of placing telephone orders, mostly through cost effective "call now" 0800 numbers. Clients like Infomercial shopping because delivery is fast, efficient, and less expensive than other marketing approaches, including person-to-person sales calls.

Direct selling companies also prefer to market their products through Infomercials because they provide immediate results after the transmission of the Infomercial through telephone calls made by interested customers. Infomercial marketers can also do business by selling a relatively narrow range of products in contrast with brick-and-mortar shops that have to stock a wide range of products, and different brands of a product in order to attract customers into their shops. It therefore is not surprising that Infomercial selling is becoming a popular, attractive, useful and important marketing method in South Africa.

# THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF INFOMERCIALS A PERSUASIVE EVENTS

Although advertisers, including Infomercial makers, often use humour their intention is not to amuse or entertain, but to persuade audiences to purchase their products. Only after purchase an Infomercial can be said to have been a successful event of persuasive communication:

In the diagram under Figure 22 below one can trace four pathways according to which an Infomercial can succeed or fail as an event of persuasive communication. Firstly, once an Infomercial has created awareness of, and an interest in a particular product, the prospective client can stop at the intention to purchase the product, in which case the Infomercial directly fails as an event of persuasive communication. Secondly, the client may phone and place an order for the product, without requesting additional information and pay by credit card.

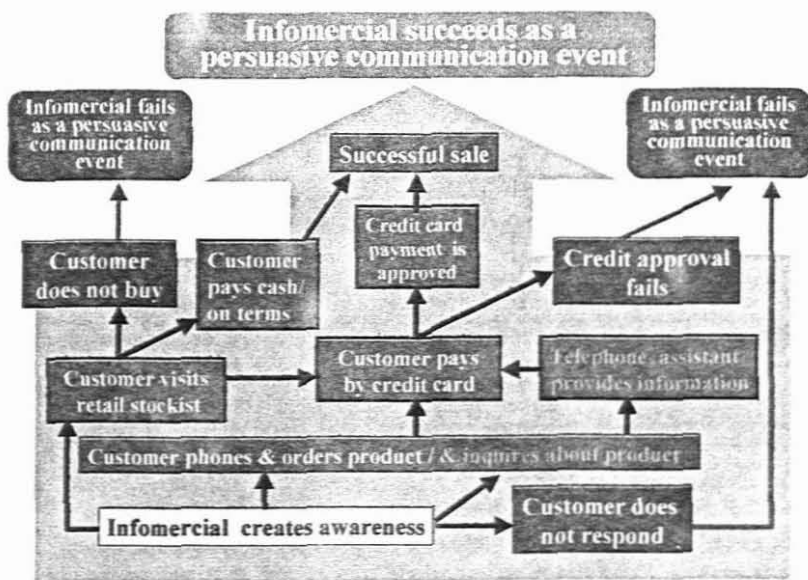


Figure 22: An Infomercial as successful or failed events of persuasive communication.

If the transaction is approved by the credit card agency the sale will go through and the Infomercial will be a successful event of persuasive communication. This is the outcome that Infomercial advertisers like best as a response to their advertise-

ment. Thirdly the client may phone and request further information about the product. The sales acumen of the telephone assistant taking the call, may determine the success or failure of the infomercial. If such a call is managed correctly the client usually proceed to order and pay by credit card. If the transaction is approved, the sale is successful, and the Infomercial succeeds as a persuasive communication event. If the credit card transaction is however turned down by the credit card agency, the Infomercial has failed. Fourthly the client may visit a supermarket that stocks the product, a dedicated agency outlet, or a bar-

row vendor, either to buy the product, or to enquire about it. Such a visit can have one of three outcomes. The client can pay for the product in cash or credit card. The cash sale on site is an instance where the Infomercial has succeeded. The on site credit card payment could succeed, or end in failure, depending on whether the transaction is approved or not. Finally, the customer may decide not to buy the product after visiting the shop, in which case the Infomercial has failed as an attempt of persuasive communication.

In summary, three events, indicted in purple, lead to the failure of an infomercial. Firstly the customer becomes aware of the product, and is interested in buying it, but for whichever reason does not respond (follow through) and purchase. Secondly the customer phones in and places an order, but her/ his credit card transaction is not approved, and thirdly the customer visits a retail stockist, but decides not to purchase the product. If the customer however phones in and places an order for which the credit card transaction is approved, or if the customer's query about the product is answered to her/ his satisfaction, and s/he orders the product for which the credit card transaction is approved, or if the customer visits a retail stockist and successfully pays by credit card or in cash the sale is successful and the Infomercial has succeeded.

From the above-mentioned analysis of the flow chart one can see there are five instances in which the Infomercial would have failed, and four instances in which the Infomercial would have succeeded as an event of persuasive communication.

## **THE MIX OF BROADCASTERS THAT TRANSMIT RADIO AND TV INFOMERCIALS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### **Stations that transmit radio infomercials**

Altogether ten radio stations and TV channels regularly transmit Infomercials on a daily basis during particular time slots to South African audiences. They constitute a mix of public service and commercial radio stations, as well as public service, commercial and private subscription TV channels

Of the twenty public service and commercial radio stations that SABC Radio manages the following four regularly transmit Infomercials to South African listeners:

- SA fm 104 – 107 (the countrywide public service English flagship radio station of SABC Radio);
- RSG 100 – 104 fm (Radio Sonder Grense, “Radio without borders,” the countrywide public service Afrikaans flagship radio station of SABC Radio);
- Metro fm (a countrywide commercial radio station that transmits to listeners in urban centres);
- Lotus fm (a commercial station that mainly caters for Indian listeners in KwaZulu-Natal).

### **Stations that transmit TV infomercials**

The following six TV channels transmit Infomercials to South African viewers:

- All three of SABC TV’s national public service channels SABC 1, SABC 2 and SABC 3;
- The commercial channel, e that is controlled by the print-media consortium;
- The DSTV satellite transcription channels M-net and the Afrikaans subscription channel, kykNET.

### **WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF INFOMERCIALS SHOWN ON SOUTH AFRICAN TV CHANNELS<sup>5</sup>**

In Figure 23 below I provide the times of the day, in the course of a week, that South African Infomercials are transmitted on the channels of the public broadcasters, SABC and e.

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<sup>5</sup> The table has been extracted from scheduling information provided in the February issue of the DSTV programme guide, *dsh*.

Channel	Day	Times
SABC 1	Monday- Friday	"Infomercials" 7:30-8:00, 9:15-10:15 & 11:15-11:45.
SABC 2	Monday- Friday	"Infomercials" 9:30-10:00 & 12:00-13:00
	Saturday	"Infomercials" 8:00-10:00
	Sunday	"Infomercials" 7:00-8:00
SABC 3	Monday - Saturday (not Thursday)	"AM Shopping" 8:00-10:00
Mnet	Monday – Friday	"Aerobics" 8:30-9:00; "The Warehouse" 9:00-10:00 & 13:00 -14:00
kykNET	Monday - Wednesday	"Vertoonvenster" (Display window) 6:00-7:00
	Thursday	"Vertoonvenster" (Display window) 6:00-7:00 & 23:00-23:55
	Friday	"Vertoonvenster" (Display window) 6:00-7:00
	Saturday	"Vertoonvenster" (Display window) 8:00-13:00
e	Monday	"Infomercials" 8:00-8:30, 12:00-12:30, "Infomercial" 23:55-00:51
	Tuesday - Wednesday	"Infomercial" 8:00-8:30
	Thursday	"Infomercial" 8:00-8:30, 12:00-12:30
	Friday	"Infomercials" 00:15-01:05, <sup>6</sup> 8:00-8:30
	Saturday - Sunday	"Infomercials" 00:15-01:05 (Saturdays)/ 01:00-01:30 (Sundays) 8:00- 8:30

Figure 23: Time slots for Infomercials on the different South African public TV channels

From the above-mentioned table can be seen that SABC 1 transmits Infomercials Mondays to Fridays. The channel transmits half an hour-long fitness type, household goods and insurance type Infomercials in the early morning (7:30-8:00), followed by hour-long Infomercials household product and insurance type products in the midmorning (9:15-10:15). In the late morning SABC 1 transmits half an hour-long image-enhancement Infomercials (11:15-11:45).

SABC 2 transmits Infomercials from Mondays to Fridays for half an hour in the midmorning (9:30-10:00), for an hour in the early afternoon (12:00-13:00), and over week-

<sup>6</sup> The DSTV programme guide lists the Infomercial as being part of Thursday late night transmissions, but it actually is transmitted just after 12 o'clock early on Friday mornings.

ends for an hour every Saturday morning (8:00-10:00) and an hour early every Sunday morning (7:00-8:00).

With the exception of Thursdays, SABC 3 transmits multi-product two hour-long self-improvement, insurance product and household product Infomercials early on weekday mornings (8:00-10:00) under the banner "AM Shopping"

Mnet transmits Infomercials in three segments from Mondays to Fridays. In the early morning (8:30-9:00) they transmit half-hourly fitness type Infomercials under the banner heading "Aerobics," immediately followed by different hour-long household product Infomercials in midmorning (9:00-10:00) and a variety of types of products in the early afternoon (13:00 -14:00).

The Afrikaans language DSTV channel, kykNET transmits Infomercials under the banner heading "Vertoonvenster" (Display window). From Mondays to Fridays kykNET transmits Infomercials that promote male and female image-enhancement products such as slimming tablets, slimming shakes, hair removers, cellulite removing soap and massage oil in the early-early morning (6:00-7:00). On Thursday late nights kykNET also transmits fifty five minute long (23:00-23:55) Infomercials for male and female image-enhancement products such as anti-dandruff shampoo, sleeping or slimming products, or home and garden utility products such as household or outdoor cooking utensils. On Saturday mornings (8:00-13:00) kykNET transmits five hour-long multi-product Infomercials for kitchen products, image-enhancement products, funeral policies and insurance products.

On Mondays e transmits half-hour long Infomercials in the early morning (8:00-8:30), in the late morning (12:00-12:30) and fifty-six minute long Infomercials late at night (23:55-00:51). On Tuesdays and Wednesdays e only transmits half an hour-long early morning Infomercials (8:00-8:30). On Thursdays e transmits half an hour long early morning (8:00-8:30) and early afternoon Infomercials (12:00-12:30). On Fridays e transmits in-the-dead-of-the-night (00:15-01:05) and early morning (8:00-8:30) infomercials. On Saturdays and Sundays e also transmits in-the-dead-of-the-night (0015:-01:05 (Saturdays)/ 01:00-01:30 (Sundays)) and early morning (8:00- 8:30) infomercials.

## COMPANIES THAT DO DIRECT MARKETING TO SOUTH AFRICAN AUDIENCES VIA TV INFOMERCIALS

In this section I will give general characterisations of five, namely those of Ostrium, Glomail, HomeMark, Outsurance, and Verimark. Thereafter I will present a more detailed case study analysis of a sixth Infomercial transmitted on behalf of Clientèle Life.



### Ostrium (Pty) Ltd

*The company behind the infomercial*

According to information provided by the company itself Ostrium (Pty) Ltd, is based in Wellington outside Cape Town, South Africa, trading as Prosper. The company markets the Betakit Global Study System, a uniquely developed South African product. It consists of a kit consisting of audio CDs, an instruction booklet and a code number that provides the client access to reserved pages on the Internet at <http://www.soundharmonics.com>. The unique CDs contain AHATA Sound Harmonics, computer-generated harmonic tones that are said to bring the subject's brain to the ideal brain state for concentration and study. There are four main programmes, *Focus*, *Recharge*, *Memree* and *Sleepstarter* which are discussed in a following section

Since 1997 students of all ages that have used this technology as a study aid that helps them to cope with study and work challenges. The company maintains high ethical standards in their advertising and in their dealings with customers. The feedback from parents, students, psychologists, teachers and other educationists, some of which is transmitted as part of the infomercials, shows that the technology of the Betakit is truly effective. More information about technical aspects of the Betakit Global Study System is available at <http://www.betakitglobal.co.za>.

**Broadcast schedule for the Betakit Global Study System Infomercials between  
14 March and 28 March 2002**

In the table below I give the days of the week and the times on those days that the Infomercials for the Betakit and Prosper products are shown on SABC 1, SABC 2, SABC 3, e and M-Net:

From this table one can see that over a two-week period from mid-March to the end of March 2002 one of the three products, the Beta Study System, the PROSPER Program or the Beta Plus System, was advertised six days a week, excluding only Sundays. The table also reveals that the Infomercials were transmitted 17 times in the early mid-morning, and 8 times round about lunchtime in the afternoons, twice as often in the mornings as in the afternoons. The implication of the preponderance of early to mid-morning advertising is that mainly housewives are purchasing these products for their families—their children or husbands.

Without giving specific pricing details, which are subject to change from time to time, the three products can be ranked as follows regarding their purchase price:

Date	Time	Channel	Product
Thursday March 14	08:30 13:30	SABC 3 M-Net	Beta Study Beta Study
Friday March 15	08:30 13:30	SABC 1 M-Net	Beta Study Beta Study
Saturday March 16	09:00	SABC 2	PROSPER
Monday March 18	11:15 13:30	SABC 1 M-Net	Beta Study Beta Study
Tuesday March 19	09:00 09:30	SABC 3 M-Net	Beta Study Beta Study
Wednesday March 20	08:30 13:00	SABC 3 M-Net	Beta Study Beta Study Beta Study
Thursday March 21	09:15 11:15 12:30	SABC 1 SABC 1 SABC 2	Beta Plus PROSPER Beta Study
Friday March 22	08:00 12:00	e-TV SABC 2	Beta Study Beta Plus
Saturday March 23	08:00	SABC 8	Beta Study
Monday March 25	08:30 09:30	SABC 3 M-Net	Beta Study Beta Study
Tuesday March 26	10:45 13:30	SABC 1 M-Net	Beta Study Beta Study
Wednesday March 27	09:00 13:00	SABC 3 M-Net	Beta Study Beta Study
Thursday March 28	09:00 09:45	M-Net SABC 1	Beta Study Beta Study

Figure 24: Transmission times and TV channels for Ostrium Infomercials



- Most expensive: Beta Study System Plus
- Moderately expensive: PROSPER Program
- Least Expensive: Beta Study System

When the frequency at which the Infomercials for these three products is compared with their price rankings it becomes apparent that the least expensive of them, the Beta Study System, at 22 transmissions over two weeks, by far outstrips the transmissions of the more expensive programmes the PROSPER Program and the Beta Study Plus System, which were each only transmitted twice over this period. Because the Beta Study System was advertised eleven times more than the other two products over the same two-week period it clearly is the fastest horse in the Creative Processes stable. In the following sections, in which I analyse the three Infomercials I will explain why this is the case.

### ***A typical Ostrium Infomercial***

The Beta Study System, the PROSPER Programme and the Beta Study System Plus are three audio programs marketed by Ostrium that are presented as products that the ability to facilitate ideal brain states for concentration, deep restful sleep, creativity and relaxation, all leading to the creation of long-term positive self-esteem by the people who use it. In the Infomercial technical explanations about the nature

The products, available on compact disks (CDs) or audio cassettes, incorporate pure-tone AHATA sound harmonics masked by audible sounds such as the background sounds encountered at a train station (the barely audible voices of a crowd, an intercom announcement, a whistle signalling the departure of a train, the soft rhythmic clattering sounds of train wheels on a track), relaxing nature sounds (birds, the sound of wind blowing through trees, the sound of a small stream of water meandering over rocks) and the sound of distant sea waves breaking on a beach.

The use of pure tone sound harmonics masked by other audible sounds is known as sound harmonics. During the Infomercial it is stated that in the wakeful state the inaudible AHATA sound harmonics synchronise the two hemispheres of the human brain that tend to operate at slightly different Hz frequencies due to hemisphere specialisation, thereby

generating brain wave states that facilitate restfulness, the ability to concentrate, and the ability to fall into a worry-free relaxed sleep.

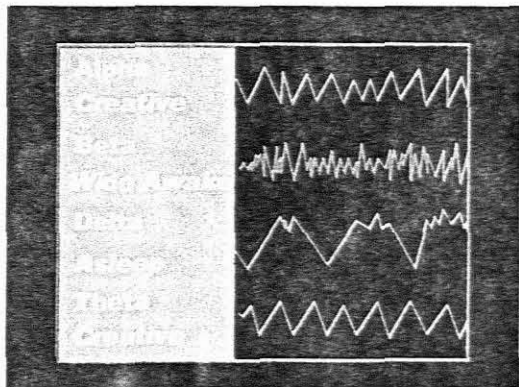


Figure 25: Brain states MHz frequencies

In the wide-awake state, when the brain emanates Beta brain waves, the left-brain functions as the generator of logical and analytical thoughts, while the right brain functions as the generator of inventive, creative, artistic non-logical thoughts. AHATA sound harmonics promote four different brain wave states known as the Alpha, Beta, Theta and Delta states as shown in Figure 25:

- The alert state is called the Beta state (12 – 40 Hz);
- The relaxed, dreamy creative state is called the Alpha state (8 – 12 Hz);
- The deeply relaxed state that we pass through as we fall asleep, and as we wake up, is called the Theta state (4 – 8 Hz);
- And the state most of our brain reaches during sleep is called the Delta state (0.5 – 4 Hz).

The CDs or cassettes contain three sound harmonics programmes, namely:

- *Focus* is said to bring the brain into a focussed mode;
- *Mega Memory* to be used while learning material off-by-heart and for being more creative. The sound harmonics is said to facilitate synchronisation of the electrical patterns in the left and right hemispheres. This is an optimal condition for improving performance and creativity.
- *Recharge*, a program, which is said to refresh one after a hard day's work or between study sessions. Within 30 minutes the user is said to be relaxed and recharged for study or pleasure;

- *Sleep Starter*, for when excitement or worry prevents one from sleeping.

Since Beta Study System is the most promoted and least expensive of the three products, and due to the fact that black mothers are used to give testimonials about the Beta Study system, but not about the PROSPER program, one can safely conclude that the Beta Study System Infomercial targets previously disadvantaged black consumers who are interested in uplifting the standard of education of their children and themselves.

Towards the end of the programme black parents are also given the opportunity to give testimonials in IsiZulu and IsiXhosa about the product and about the improvements in the work performance of their children. The instruction booklet also contains IsiZulu and IsiXhosa sections along with ones in English, Afrikaans, French and German.

### ***TV watching, induced brain states and the persuasive effects of Infomercials***

It is worth noting that the Theta state (at 4 – 8 Hz) and the Alpha state (at 8 – 12 Hz) effectively form a continuum, starting with a state of semi-wakefulness (when one is either waking up, or drifting off to sleep) and ending in a mind state of relaxed creativeness. In both brain states the experiencer effectively defocuses on her/ his surroundings.

In a report published in the *Scientific American* of February 2002 on the effect that watching TV has on human brain states Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi give the results of an experiment where participants carried a beeper, and were signalled at random six to eight times a day over the period of a week to report their mind state at that time. Whenever they heard the beep, they documented what they were doing and how they were feeling by using a standardised scorecard. According to Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, "People who were watching TV when we beeped them reported feeling relaxed and passive. The EEG studies similarly show less mental stimulation, as measured by alpha brain-wave production, during viewing than during reading."

The relaxed brain state of TV viewers (discernable by the predominance of Alpha brain waves) reported by Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, and the same brain state (Alpha waves between 8 – 12 Hz) achievable by means of the AHATA sound harmonics technology of Creative Processes (Pty) Ltd may also indicate that people are at their most recep-

tive, open to suggestion, and easily persuadable by Infomercials precisely because watching TV puts them in that mind state.

## Glomail Pty Ltd



### *The company behind the Infomercial*

According to promotional information on its website at <http://www.glomail.co.za/> Glomail is an international company based in Toronto, Canada with a substantial profile in South African direct marketing. According to promotional material on the Glomail website the international company's objectives include the development and sourcing of unique, innovative products, worldwide distribution of Glomail products (through strategic alliances with TV product advertising, retail and mail order companies worldwide), and the production of television Infomercials and commercials.

In South Africa Glomail markets its products directly over the TV through infomercials, supplemented by selling from the following retail outlets:

- Over 50 fully owned Glomail shops
- Over 20 franchised Glomail outlets
- Over 300 chain store "Glomail Shop within a Shop"

### *A typical Glomail Infomercial*

Glomail uses 5 different 30-minute Infomercials to promote their products over 4 different TV stations, SABC 1, SABC 2, SABC 3, and e. They promote cookware, houseware, a steam iron known as *Wonder Steamer*, a slimming product known as *Slender C* and electronic body-trimming pads worn under special isolating black rubber shorts, known as *Electro Gym*. In this section I will give a characterisation of the *Slender C* infomercial:

This Infomercial is transmitted in SABC 1 from 7:30 to 8:00 on certain Mondays and Thursdays, on SABC 2 from 5:30 to 6:00 and from 12:00 to 12:30 on certain Thursdays. On other Mondays and Thursdays Glomail advertises other products in these time slots.

A notable feature of the *Slender C* Infomercial is that the consumer journalist, Isabel Jones, who is extensively involved as authority figure in Verimark's *Bauer Cookware* and *Twister* food processor infomercials, also appears in this one.

The *Slender C* Infomercial begins with Isabel Jones is being interviewed by Paula Galvao, who projects the image of either a dietician or a medical practitioner specialising in diet-related health problems. At the beginning of the Infomercial a trim Isabel Jones portrays the role of a patient who has successfully implemented a weight loss regimen in which *Slender C* played a prominent role. The background voice of ex-broadcaster Collin Fluxman, who is extensively used in Glomail infomercials, explains that since Isabel Jones started using *Slender C* neither the types of food consumed, nor her eating habits have changed. Jones comes on set in step with the rhythm of cheerful instrumental music. Emphasising newfound vigour due to weight loss Jones lightly hops onto the scale to check her weight. Emanating surprise at the most recent weight loss, Galvao reveals that Jones has lost 10.5 kilograms and 76 centimetres in three months. With eyes wide from surprise Galvao announces to the camera, "Welcome new Isabel Jones."

With Galvao asking Isabel whether she is no longer eats food like steaks and chips the scene changes, showing Jones eating in a restaurant, behind a plate of steak and chips. This scene emphasises that loosing weight is not stopping a person from eating the kind of food that s/he likes, as long as s/he uses *Slender C*.

The Infomercial starts with Jones who is a reputable consumer journalist, whose opinions are generally held in high regard. Thereafter an overweight white woman is shown cooking in a big pot on a gas stove outside a house with young children playing in the background. She is so obese that her children are unable to give her a hug around her waist. The lesson emerging from this scene is that getting fat lessens the opportunity for children to show love to parents. She is then shown against the same background, considerably slimmer after having been on *Slender C*, with her children now hugging her around her waste As the background voice of Collin Fluxman explains that *Slender C* has been designed and trusted by physicians, a white man wearing a white coat, projecting the image of a chemist in a chemical laboratory with test tubes and other instruments about, explains how they tested the product and emphasises that it is a drug-free product made of natural substances.

At the end of the Infomercial a variety of satisfied users of *Slender C* give testimonials. This includes the interviewer, Paula Galvao, who is shown considerably plumper on her wedding day than at present after having since started using *Slender C*. A few people from the audience were also given the chance to give testimonials, among them a middle aged female who introduces herself as Della Perry, and announcing that she has lost 10 kilograms in three months. While people are busy giving testimonials a toll-free number in red, appears on screen and keeps on flashing with an e-mail address underneath. After the audience has given testimonials Isabel Jones comes on screen again and gives a summary of the nature and benefits of Slender. While she is busy giving details about product and its contents, her image and voice fade and is replaced by an image of the product and its price while Colin Fluxman's voice explains in the background what one gets when buying the product, what the different payment options are. Finally he repeats the toll free number on the screen, and the special offers that are available to those that call right away.

### ***The Glomail website***

With its banner prominently displayed on top left hand side, and the "As seen on TV" logo prominently displayed on the top right hand side, the Glomail homepage at <http://www.glomail.co.za/catalogue/> opens with borders of royal blue and burgundy red, separating an upper welcoming banner frame and a lower frame that advertises nine of the company's premier products as shown in Figure 26 below:



Figure 26: Image of the Glomail homepage (used with permission of Glomail)

On a royal blue horizontal bar white text segments, “Shop Directory, Guarantee, How to Buy Online, Contact Us, Franchise” and “Glomail History” serve as live links to give access to pages containing further information about the company, its products and its services. Notable is the “Franchise” link, which leads to a page that contains an online application form for those that are interested in opening a Glomail franchise as a business venture. Below that images of the premier product range are organised into nine rectangular boxes. Accompanying each image in its box, is a brief characterisation of it in royal blue text, offset against white a background. Each product image serves as a clickable live link to further information about it. To the right hand bottom side of each product box red text “More Info” forms a similar link to further information about it. The products are:

- *Electronic Absolution*, a battery powered abdominal belt that emits impulses to tighten and strengthen abdominal muscles;
- *Bio Slim* capsules that are said to promote the natural burning of body fat, and to inhibit fat absorption;
- *Bavaria Cookware*, solid cast aluminium non-stick cookware;

- *Absolution Roller*, a dual grip kneel-and-forward-roll device to strengthen abdominal muscles;
- *Restore 4*, a surface regenerating fluid;
- *Taebo*, a martial arts set-to-music exercise video programme;
- *Trim 'n lift*, stomach and buttocks enhancing undergarments for females;
- *Pool Blitz*, a once a month swimming pool treatment liquid;
- *Hair fantastique*, a hair restoring and anti-dandruff product,

At the top left hand corner animated text, which spells "Product" one word at a time appears in white letters, followed by "Directory," which appears in red letters all at once. This text forms a live link to a page that promotes seven product ranges: DIY, Kitchen & Dining, Fitness & Health, Entertainment and Leisure, Self-Improvement Motor Vehicle Products and Children's Educational.

At the bottom right hand of the page flashing white text, "Click here to enter our full product Directory!" gives access to the same pages displaying Glomail's product range.

## HomeMark Pty Ltd



### *The company behind the Infomercial*

According to promotional information supplied on its website at <https://www.homemark.co.za/default-ie.htm> by its Managing Director, Avi Ovadia, HomeMark is committed to providing quality products to South African consumers. According to Ovadia HomeMark has the objective of finding and providing products that are innovative and relevant to the South African public at affordable prices. By selling directly to consumers via TV and the Internet, HomeMark products keeps its products affordable in the closely contested and sophisticated South African direct marketing sector.

Ovadia states that its terms and conditions ensure that their customers are always satisfied - or that they get their money back. Constant quality control ensures that no products



are made available for sale the company is satisfied that they fulfil the claims made by manufacturers.

Ovadia points out that because HomeMark forms part of one of the country's foremost e-commerce groups, *eCompany* customers are assured of safety of purchasing HomeMark goods via the Internet. *eCompany* (<http://www.ecompany.co.za/>) is a South African-based, integrated e-commerce company, developing, distributing and operating proprietary e-commerce platforms and technologies in selected global markets.

### ***A typical HomeMark Infomercial***

The only Infomercial that HomeMark is transmitting at present<sup>7</sup> is their *Impact Toolkit*, which is shown on SABC 2 on some Tuesdays. The Infomercial presents an electric drill and accompanying accessories, contained in a well-organised carry case, in the form of an entertaining narrative of a disorganised husband with a disorganised toolkit, who is assisted by a family friend, the proud owner of the *Impact Toolkit*, to complete a list of do-it-yourself jobs around the home.

The Infomercial opens in kitchen scene, with the wife asking her husband to perform a number of DIY chores that he has been putting off. While she goes shopping he tries to put up a wooden wall mount for a trophy that he had won in golf. Just after completing the job by hammering undersized nails directly into the wall, and affixing the wall mount, the front door bell rings. It is his friend with the *Impact Toolkit*, offering assistance. By the time they get back to the trophy wall mount, it is hanging skew because one of the nails has pulled out of the wall.

Against the initial resistance of the homeowner the friend begins to help him complete the procrastinated DIY duties with the aid of the *Impact Toolkit*.

### ***The HomeMark website***

The HomeMark website at <http://www.homemark.co.za> profiles eight premier products, and provides links to a further range of products, organised into particular categories.

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<sup>7</sup> The company has been contacted telephonically to ascertain whether they are perhaps transmitting other Infomercials that I am not aware of, but their spokesperson has not come back to me about my inquiry.

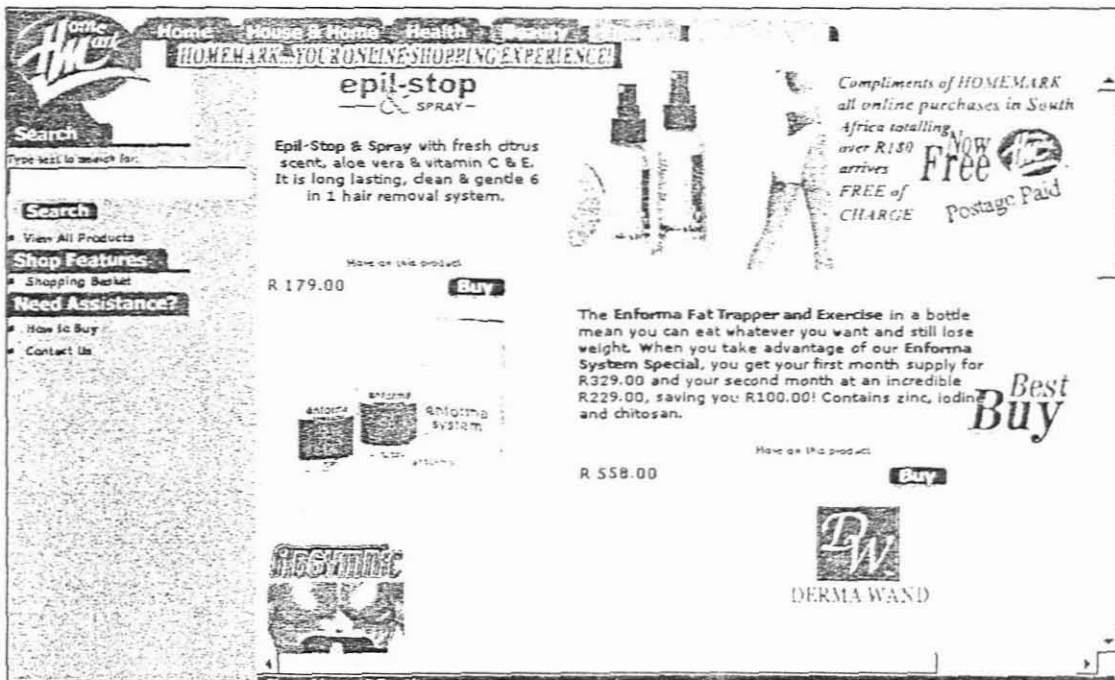


Figure 27: The HomeMark homepage (used with permission of HomeMark)

The image of the website in Figure 27 above displays four of HomeMark's eight premier products. The eight products are:

- The *Epil-Stop & Spray* hair removal system,
- The *Enforma Fat Trapper and Exercise* in a bottle,
- The *Abgymnic* battery-driven abdominal belt that is said to firm abdominal muscles by means of electric impulses,
- The *Derma Wand*, an instrument that delivers oxygen rich impulses to the skin to firm, tone, retexturise and purify it,
- *Pro Fix 6*, a paint surface restorer,
- *pest Alert* (sic), an electronic device that is said to transmit high frequency waves that drive away insects, mice and rats,

- *Cheat & Eat*, capsules that are said to inhibit fat absorption, thereby promoting weight loss, and
- *Cellu Trim*, a product aimed at females, made of natural substances, said to help reduce cellulite and reduce the swelling and fluid accumulation,

The front page of the website also contains links to subsequent pages that promote a wider range of products in the categories *House & Home* (leading to further product pages *Utensils*, *Cookware*, *Cleaning*, *Storage*, *Housewares* and *Stationary & Games*), *Health* (leading to further product pages *Slimming Products*, *Personal Health*, *Health Accessories* and *Sleep Accessories*), *Beauty* (leading to further product pages *Skin Care*, *Dental Care*, *Beauty Accessories* and *Hair Removal*), *Fitness* (leading to further product pages *Exercise* and *Slimming Products*), and finally the *Garage & DIY* page (leading to further product pages *Durable Products*, *DIY* and *Car Accessories*).

## Outsurance Pty Ltd



### *The company behind the Infomercial*

Promotional information provided on its website at <http://www.outsurance.co.za/> portrays OUTsurance as one of South Africa's newest and fastest-growing short term insurance companies, which has developed a unique computing system to manage its business. The innovative aspects of OUTsurance are briefly outlined in the next two sections.

### Rewards for no-claim clients

Since its inception in February 1998, Outsurance, a Rand Merchant Bank Holdings (RMB) direct short-term operation, aimed to retain clients by offering no-lose short-term insurance products. According to promotional statements on their home page

In an interview published in Sunday Times' Business Times supplement of 16 May 1999 Managing Director René Otto explains the reasons for the success of Outsurance. According to him Outsurance pioneered a process that they believe will become the norm in South African short-term insurance. We think all insurance will be done the 'Outsurance way' eventually. Otto states: "We saw the opportunity to make a paradigm shift in insur-

ance with a novel concept: clients are rewarded for not claiming. As far as we know, we are unique in the western world."

Outsurance rewards its clients with a cash payment after three claim-free years equalling 10% of the total amount they have paid in premiums to date. This bonus escalates to 20% after five years without claims and 25% annually thereafter. In this way clients are rewarded for being loyal.

"Another benefit is that it discourages people from making small claims. Six percent of claims are currently being withdrawn, because customers are reconsidering forfeiting their 'Outbonuses'. That's what we want, because administering a small claim costs the same as administering a large claim. We expect this percentage to increase as the pay-outs draw closer," he says.

In contrast to typical seasonal trends which peak in mid-summer, Outsurance's claims ratio showed a 10% improvement over the previous quarter at the end of 1998. This is due, Otto believes, to the fact that customers are realising that they are fairly treated and do not have to resort to loading their claims to get some of their own back. The first quarter of this year has seen a continuation of the downward trend in the loss ratio.

Otto feels that Outsurance is already gaining a reputation for its vigorous and open operating style, its ability to analyse data and react swiftly, and its focus on retaining customers through service and products that reward loyalty.

To operate profitably, Otto says, claims must be kept below 70% of income from premiums. The company is on target, thanks to the entrepreneurial approach the entire RMB group is renowned for.

"Although our premiums are often the lowest, we are not necessarily the cheapest insurer - it would be contrary to our actuarial culture if we were - but we give excellent value for money. In a price-sensitive market, what sets us apart are service levels and excellent products, plus additional features and benefits which ensure that our clients are in the same position after a claim is settled as they were before making it.

## The importance of good customer relationships

According to Otto excellent customer relationships are play an important part in his company's success: "Forging long-term relationships with our customers is critical for us. The short-term industry in South Africa is generally characterised by low levels of customer loyalty, often due to perceived poor service. In this climate, our focus on treating our customers well is paying off in the number of referrals and letters of thanks we are receiving."

## The Outsurance Infomercials

In this section I will give a general characterisation of two Outsurance infomercials, which I will respectively call the multiple persona Infomercial and the candid camera infomercial.

In the first infomercial, which is not transmitted at present, East London born soap opera star Ashley Taylor, dressed in various appropriate guises, plays the roles of multiple persona, much in the chameleon style of acting that the British comedian, the late Peter Sellers, pioneered and became famous for in comedies such as *Soft Beds, Hard Battles* (1973), *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1979), and *The Fiendish Plot of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1980).

The multiple persona Infomercial starts with Taylor, formally dressed in a black suit, white shirt, black tie and dark-rimmed glasses, portraying a slightly on edge presenter who is outlining the nature and benefits of Outsurance, a special brand of short-term insurance. As he talks, his image shrinks and a summary of what he says, appears on screen next to him. In the second scene Taylor portrays another male representative of Outsurance, less formally dressed in black pants and an open neck off-white shirt, basically summarising the information presented in the previous scene. In the third scene Taylor portrays an Evita Bezuidenhout-like persona (of Pieter Dirk-Uys fame), sumptuously dressed in blue, standing behind a wooden balustrade on a stairway, explaining how much money she saved due to Outsurance's outbonus payback scheme. Taylor then reappears in the Outsurance representative persona, expressing surprise at how much the female persona saved, reiterating the advantages of the scheme. Thereafter Taylor portrays various types of prospective and satisfied customers, including a prosperous farmer, at each stage emphasising the advantages of Outsurance, including the savings that can be effected by the no-claim Out-bonus system.

The second infomercial, made in vintage candid camera format, initially sees Taylor along with a female presenter, emphasising the advantages of OUTSURANCE. Soon the Infomercials shows Taylor in a garage setting, dressed up in navy-blue trousers and a white open neck shirt, playing the role of an insurance claims assessor, putting accident victims on about the outrageous excess amount that they have to pay before their panel-beaten vehicles can be released to them. After recording the expressions of disbelief and dismay on the faces of his hapless victims, Taylor reveals that hidden cameras have recorded their reactions, including a hidden camera worn on his shirt. Thereafter he emphasises that their excesses are much lower than he had led them to believe, and that such low excesses are characteristic of Outsurance.

While the first Infomercial is a tour de force in creativity and understated humorous acting on the part of Taylor, the second Infomercial is problematic. The first Infomercial namely evokes pleasant emotive responses, while the second infomercial, in the case of some viewers at least, will tend to evoke a feeling of sympathy with the victims, rather than a feeling of trust in Outsurance. In my view the second Infomercial basically trivialises an event that is meant to inspire customer confidence and garner customer loyalty. How the general public will react, only time will tell.

### ***The Outsurance website***

The Outsurance homepage at <http://www.outsurance.co.za/> opens in avocado green, neon green, purple and white as shown in Figure 28 on the next page:

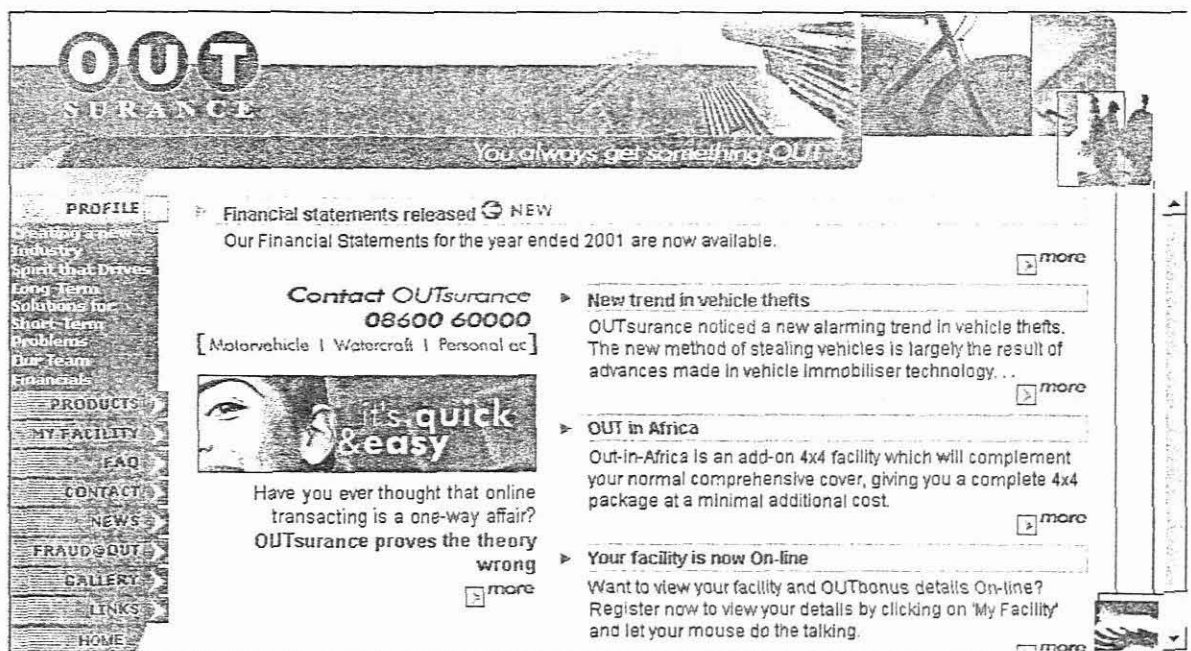


Figure 28: the OUTsurance homepage (used with permission of OUTsurance)

The headline banner consists of three consecutive horizontal bands that carry, white, avocado green and purple. These bands incorporate a variety of graphical elements. The most eye-catching part of the headline banner spells “OUT” in white letters, straddling the white and purple bands. Each letter of “OUT” is individually isolated on a purple circle. Immediately below “OUT” the white lettered neologism “SURANCE” is offset against the avocado green band. Immediately below the green band, a narrower purple band supports a slogan that provides the rationale for the name, “Outsurance” as the neologistic adaptation of the word “insurance”: “You always get something OUT”.

Incorporated on the homepage’s headline banner are various mood setting enigmatic graphical elements, namely three converging skyscrapers in various shades of purple and green; a close up view of part of a bicycle frame and front wheel, with an image of a water bottle on the diagonal part of the frame suggesting that it is a racing cycle; the letters “out” placed horizontally on a neon green shaded object that could be an upright suitcase; below and slightly to the right of the “suitcase”, two silhouetted human figures in walking postures against a smudged purple and white backdrop that could be a cityscape; vertically below the walking figures, at the bottom right hand side of the homepage, an enigmatic image in shades of white, purple and black displays what seems to be a stack of coins that have fallen over.

Other enigmatic graphical images, appropriately set on particular linked pages, include the front views of speeding cars on a highway, a close up view of the front wheel and part of the chassis of a motorbike, the grill and headlight of a truck, the dashboard of a car, computer keyboard keys, various images of houses, buildings, and skyscrapers at night, the inner workings of a wrist watch, a close-up image of some of the buttons of a TV remote control, a chest X-ray, a partial side view of someone in a wheelchair, an image of someone on a jet ski, various images of persons on yachts, images of off-road vehicles, paper clips, drawing pins, the buttons of a cell phone, an enlarged finger print, and a pistol nozzle.

The estrangement effect of the above-mentioned enigmatic graphical elements creates a mood of uncertainty as backdrop for the clearly identifiable product name “Outsurance” and the slogan “You always get something OUT”, which are therefore experienced as elements of certainty.

On the left hand side of the page a menu with purple letters on a neon green background, reveals “follow me” arrows when the mouse cursor is moved over them. When clicked, a particular menu item down-drops a sub-menu in white letters on an avocado green background. If a sub-menu item is clicked, a new page opens, revealing a new set of enigmatic images to complement the text heading for that section. The main menu items are Products, My Facility, FAQ, Contact, News, Fraud@OUT, Gallery, Links and HOME.

Just to the right of the neon green menu bar two frenetic automated information scroll features compete for attention. The first one is a non-interactive text scroll feature that strings a list Outsurance’s products across a five centimetre aperture from right to left at a speed that only practiced readers will be able to decode. The second information scroll element replaces three hortative text messages in white offset against purple backgrounds, which incorporate the smiling human faces of males and females of different ethnic groups:

An African male with a reassuring smile accompanies the exhortation: “Get an OUTsurance quote”

Two enigmatic dark haired images in quick succession, being either a close up image at a 50° sideways angle of a young female, followed by a frontal image of a young smiling



male, or two images of a single gay person accompany the reassurance “It’s quick and easy”

The image of a smiling blond female face accompanies the slogan: “OUTsurance You always get something OUT”.

### ***Downloadable Outsurance TV advertisements***

One of the linked pages the website provides two TV advertisements for individuals whose computers have the Quick Time video streaming plug-in installed.

The first advertisement opens with a street scene showing diners at sidewalk tables. It then zooms past them into the building, showing the maitre de in front of a live lobster tank, with a client ordering all of them to the puzzlement of the maitre de. The final scene shows the client releasing the lobsters into the sea, with a voice over message reassuring the viewer that s/he will also be able to do as s/he pleases with the OUTsurance bonus.

The second 30-second advertisement opens with strumming guitar music and ticking sounds, showing a car parked at a parking metre. It then zooms in on a uniformed female traffic cop patrolling her beat. As she gets to the parking metre she watches how the red parking time-over flag comes up, accompanied by the expiry bell sound. With a voice intoning and asking, “What would you do with your cash OUTbonus?” the camera zooms in on the traffic cop’s hand reaching for her ballpoint pen in her breast pocket. It then cuts to her face, showing her glancing around to see if she is being observed. Smiling gleefully she then pulls a coin out of her pocket and feeds the expired parking metre. With the voice exhorting viewers to phone the supplied telephone number and take out OUTsurance, the female cop is seen from behind, walking down the street, leaping into the air and clicking her heels in a gesture of satisfied achievement.

In summary, the first Outsurance infomercial, the design of its homepage and downloadable 30-seconds TV advertisements reflect a high standard of creativity, which should play a significant role in the persuasive appeal of these advertisements.

***OUTsurance print media advertisements on the OUTsurance website***

The print media advertisement in Figure 29 below, in the characteristic avocado green and purple colours of OUTsurance, uses the well-known comedic and tragic masks of the theatre in an emotional sales pitch that implies that increases in interest rate hikes can be offset by savings as an OUTsurance client.

An illustration featuring two theater masks: a tragic mask on the left and a comedic mask on the right. A large upward-pointing arrow is positioned to the left of the masks, and a large downward-pointing arrow is to the right. The masks are rendered in a detailed, metallic style.

**Rate Hike?**

**Can't afford your bond and insurance premiums?  
At least you can still afford OUTsurance.**

The recent interest rate increase may have left you strapped for cash. That's the bad news. Even worse news is that some short-term insurance companies are going to up their premiums by as much as 20%. The good news, there is still OUTsurance. So if you haven't got it, get it - and get more than just a minimal annual increase, the best premium, a cash OUTbonus and a flat excess. Get peace of mind.

**For car and household insurance, call**

**OUT**  
SURANCE

**YOU ALWAYS GET SOMETHING OUT**

**0 8 6 0 0 6 0 0 0 0**

[www.outsurance.com](http://www.outsurance.com)

Mon. - Thurs. 8.00am - 8.00pm • Fri. 8.00am - 6.00pm • Sat. 8.30am - 12.30pm

OUT/AD/17/E

Figure 29: The OUTsurance print media advertisement on the company's website (used with permission of OUTsurance)

On a more subtle level the advertisement also suggests that if you are insured with the right short term insurance company—OUTsurance—you will smile during times of drama, but if you are with the wrong short term insurance company—any other company—you will be weeping during times of drama.



**Verimark Pty Ltd**

***The company behind the Infomercial***



According to an undated *Business Times* report at <http://www.btimes.co.za/97/1012/survey/survey9.htm#web> the South African direct marketing company Verimark sets direct marketing pace internationally with some of the world's largest direct response firms keen to learn from it. Verimark was founded 21 years ago by a chartered accountant, the brother of the present CEO, Michael Van Straaten, who joined Verimark four years later. The two brothers ran the business together until 1993, when Michael Van Straaten bought full control.

Annual turnover grew from an initial R250 000 twenty-one years ago to about R250-million in 1998. The group employs 300 people and buys more television airtime for its Infomercials than any other company in SA.

Van Straaten has extensive experience in direct marketing, starting with door-to-door direct selling in his student days: "As a student I worked as a door-to-door salesman and, later, at trade fairs in Chile, Australia and America," says Van Straaten. "I have had hands-on experience of all the key areas of the business and understand the importance of integrating these into a fully co-ordinated unit."

Direct response TV marketing means selling a highly focused range of products by TV advertisements and mail order. Direct response is not unique to SA, but Verimark has pioneered and adapted the concept over the years.

"What makes Verimark special is that direct response has been adapted to the traditional retail environment," says Van Straaten. "We pioneered the 'shop within a shop' concept seen in all the major retailers, with TV and full-time demonstrators. We further broadened our distribution channel by opening our own 75-strong Verimark chain of stores."

Verimark's strength is its product selection - only the best quality products are chosen - and, as a result, the company enjoys an 80% product success rate compared with the international norm of 10%. To control the rapid expansion of the business into a diversified operation, the company has built a powerful management team.

Emphasising Verimark's multi marketing business strategy, Van Straaten says: "South Africa has some of the toughest retailers in the world and I attend all critical negotiation. We are one of the largest suppliers to chain stores and, for our service levels, have been awarded Supplier of the Year by some of them. At Verimark we do everything under one roof, which gives us greater control."

### ***The Verimark Infomercials***

In the course of a week Verimark transmits a wide range Infomercials over SABC1, SABC 2, SABC 3 and e: The 18 piece *Bastille* stainless steel cookware, the *Bauer* non-stick cookware, the *Le Chef* manual food processor, the *Twista Pro* manual food processor, The *Fat Burners* slimming capsules, the *Health Walker* slimming machine, the *Ab Energiser* multipurpose electronic exercise belt, the *Abflex II* abdominal exercising system, the *Maxxus Home Gym*, the *Orbitrek Elliptical Trainer*, the battery operated *Touch Lights*, the hair removers, and *Diamond Guard* valet car kit, The *Prolong* lubricant range.

In this section I will give a general characterisation of one of the before-mentioned infomercials, the one for the *Le Chef* food processor. This Infomercial begins in black-and-white in an old style kitchen where a middle-aged white female uses an old style metal grater to slice chunks of carrot. While the woman is busy grating the carrots, the background voice of the ex-TV newsreader, Colin Fluxman, asks if you still want to use the old way to make salads. The scene changes to full colour and shows the food journalist, Isabel Jones and a middle-aged white male named "Keith," dressed in a white chef's outfit in a modern kitchen. Isabel greets him, and then introduces him as a well-known chef who is going to tell the audience and the viewers at home about the *Le Chef* 10-in-1 food processor. Keith shows what the *Le Chef* looks like and what it can do. He shows all the blades one can use to make different shapes of different vegetables. He proceeds to demonstrate how to make spiral onions, cucumbers and potatoes that one can use as a garnish around roasted chicken. Isabel tastes the vegetables and invites the audience for a taste. They all agree that it is delicious. Keith tells the viewers that there is more than "the *Le Chef* from

Verimark” can do. He shows how to make a sauce out of tomatoes. After seeing how much the *Le Chef* can do Isabel wants to know much one can pay for such an amazing food processor. Keith jovially replies that he is not a sales person but a chef. While he says that a number to call, the price of the product, the names of participating stores appear on the screen, as well as the Verimark online website.

### The Verimark website

Verimark’s homepage at <http://www.verimark.co.za> opens with a splash page in shades of blue to sea green, spearmint green, red and white, with a prominent slogan in handwriting style, “**Innovation, Quality and Service Guaranteed!**” The splash page provides little written information, but instead displays a collage of Verimark’s top selling products. In the foreground is the celebrity figure, the nineteen-nineties ex-Springbok rugby captain, Francois Pienaar, leaning against a nondescript horizontal object in a relaxed pose as shown in Figure 30 below.

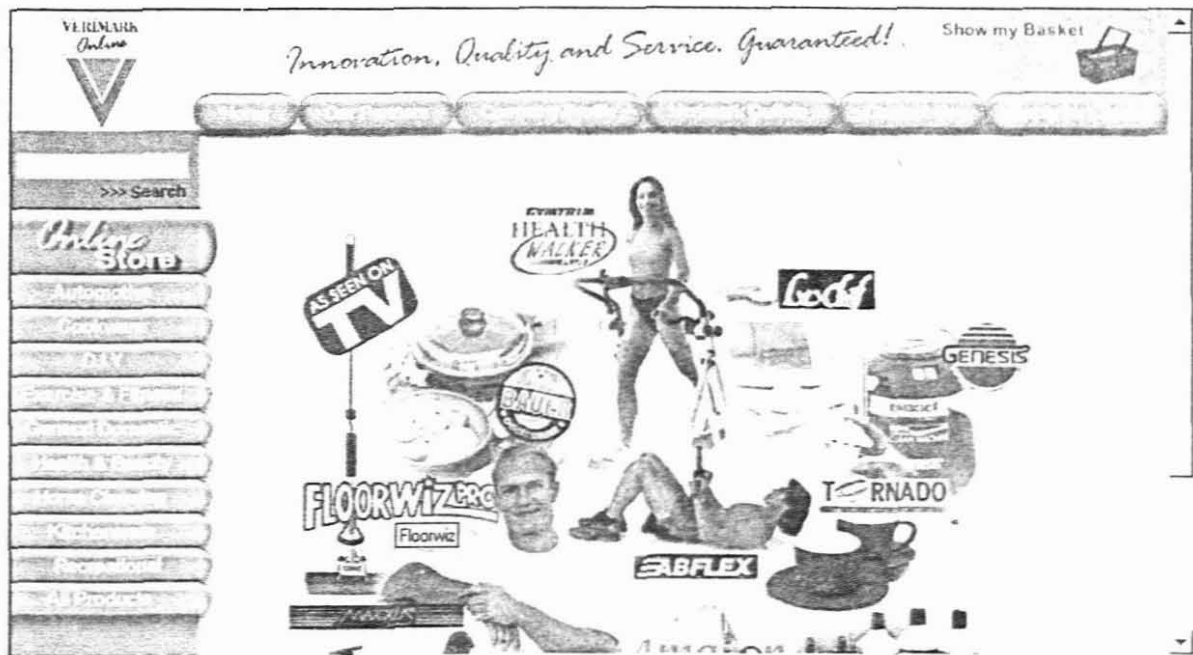


Figure 30: The Verimark homepage (used with permission of Verimark)

At the left hand top of the homepage is a site search facility. The labelled object images on the homepage are all live links to more detailed information about the particular products, namely:

- The *Health Walker* exercise machine,

- The *Abflex* stomach exercise instrument,
- The *Maxxus* personal trainer,
- The *Bauer* non-stick aluminium cookware set,
- The *Genesis* vacuum cleaner,
- The electronic handheld *Tornado* cappuccino and milkshake whisk,
- The *Le Chef* mechanical food processor,
- The Floor Wiz Pro mop,
- The *Amazon* anti-smoking mouth spray,
- The *Diamond Guard* car care product range.

Dividing the product images and the quality guaranteed slogan is a set of white-text-on-sea-green virtual buttons that are links to the following further information pages:

Home, Our Partners, Company Profile, Verimark Outlets, Contact Us and

Apply for Credit.

While all direct selling companies accept online credit card payments, Verimark is the only company that extends credit to approved clients.

To the left of the screen is a vertically organised set of buttons, serving as live links to the following Verimark product ranges: *Online Store, Automotive, Cookware, D.I.Y. Exercise & Fitness, General Domestic, Health & Beauty, Home Cleaning, Kitchenware, Recreational* and *All Products*. Overall, these live links lead to pages that promote 36 different products.

## CLIENTÈLE LIFE



### *The company behind the Infomercial*

According to information provided on its website at <http://www.clientelelife.com/> Clientèle Life is South Africa's newest life assurance company listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Prior to its listing in 1997 the company existed since 1952 when Security Life of the United Kingdom

established its operations in South Africa. In 1982 the company was sold to South African interests and was listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange as Crusader Life. In 1992 Dr. Brian Benfield and Mr. Bruce Howard, respectively as Chairman and Managing Director, founded the privately owned company, Clientèle Financial Services. In 1995 Clientèle was one of four finalists for the National Institute of Marketing Management's Marketing Organisation of the Year award. In the same year Clientèle was recognised as one of South Africa's top 20 non-listed companies.

In 1997 Clientèle Financial Services acquired Crusader Life and amalgamated the services of the two companies to create Clientèle Life, a listed company on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Presently Hollard, a privately owned financial services company owns the majority of Clientèle Life's shares. A defining characteristic of Clientèle's operation is that of the Independent Field Advisor (IFA), essentially a system where persons can act independently (read, "not being on the payroll of Clientèle Life") on a part-time basis to garner new clients for the company, for the payment of a commission.

### ***The Clientèle Life Infomercial***

This thirty-minute Infomercial on SABC 2 begins with the signature tune of a nineteen eighties style TV news bulletin, and two ex newsreaders, Adrian Steed and Ellen Erasmus Morton sitting in a news studio setting behind a news presenter's desk. Steed, dressed in a pinstripe suit, wearing a royal blue shirt and matching tie, is sitting to the left of Erasmus Morton.

Behind them is a blue-and-orange grid consisting of smallish royal blue squares, defined by orange gridlines. Superimposed on the grid are the letters CNC, also in orange, one letter over four squares. On both sides of the CNC grid are royal blue pillars. Initially it is unclear what CNC stands for, perhaps alluding to the worldwide 24-hour news channel CNN (Cable News Network). Soon Adrian Steed however reveals that CNC stands for Clientèle News Channel, "the only place where one gets the Last Dignity Plan from Clientèle."

The Infomercial capitalises on the status of Steed and Erasmus Morton as nineteen eighties newsreaders, intending to create a tone of newsworthiness and credibility for the products promoted in the infomercial.

Steed and Erasmus Morton talk formally about how much money we spend when buying clothes, forgetting how much we need when losing a loved one, and what we can do to become financially independent.



Figure 31: The Clientèle Life logo

While still in conversation the sound is gradually faded out and Steed and Erasmus Morton disappear off screen. The next scene shows a single-story white building bearing the Clientèle blue-and-white stylised castle turret logo as in Figure 31 above, and next to it, written in red, the words “Clientèle Life.” The image of the building is replaced with that of another white male, dressed in a black suit, a white shirt and a maroon tie. He introduces a funeral policy, the Last Dignity Plan, explaining, “what it can do for you.”

The white male’s image is replaced by the half waist image of a black male who introduces himself as “Mandla.” In real life he is Themba Hlatshwayo, an actor who played the role of a lawyer, Dick Sithole, in the popular Soapy, *Dick Sithole*, which was transmitted over SABC 1 on Thursdays some years ago. Hlatshwayo is smartly dressed in a grey blazer, a yellow shirt and a floral tie, promoting the Last Dignity Plan. As he talks about “what the last dignity plan can do for you” pieces of a puzzle self-assemble next to him, revealing the words “Last Dignity Plan, the final gift of life.” After the black presenter’s image has faded, a message appears on screen under the heading “Clientèle Tips,” recommending the Last Dignity Plan.

Steed and Erasmus Morton appear again, dressed in the same clothes as before. Steed challenges Erasmus Morton to guess how much interest Clientèle Life charges. Erasmus Morton guesses about 15%. To her great “surprise” she learns that the interest is lower than 5%. Erasmus Morton then moves off set, and is next shown in a black-and-white street scene, chatting to passers-by, still dressed in the same clothes as before, asking them how much they would be prepared to spend if they lost their loved ones. The passers-by indicate that they are prepared to spend large sums of money for their loved ones. The black-and-white street scene is then replaced by a colour scene where Erasmus Morton directly addresses the TV viewers, indicating that Clientèle Life’s funeral policy, the Lasting Dignity Plan, only costs R1, 00 per day. She then urges the viewers to phone the toll free number that appears on screen, where people are waiting to answer their calls. Morton Erasmus then appears among about twenty females sitting in blue cubicles, all wearing light blue



matching tops, each sporting a telephone headset, waiting to answer incoming telephone calls.

Then the scene changes and a waist-up image of a standing Erasmus Morton is shown, still wearing her royal blue top and cravat, giving tips to the TV viewers. As Erasmus Morton mentions a particular tip, it appears on the screen in white text beneath a red banner heading, "Clientèle Life Tips." A head-and shoulders image appears of white male in his forties, with short hair and dressed in a khaki shirt like a farmer. He gives a verbal testimonial of how Clientèle Life helped his family when his father was killed in KwaZulu-Natal. He says he just phoned Clientèle Life and the money they got together, with the assistance of his brother, helped them to pay for every thing that his father owed.

The scene changes again and Erasmus Morton is shown in a different outfit, a cream white pantsuit and a fashionable grey-and-cream striped tight fitting t-shirt, visiting a hospital, talking about how expensive medication is. She is talking in front of a counter in a reception room, emphasising "It is not a hassle when you have hospital cash plan from Clientèle Life for as little as R1 per day."

There is another change of scene, with Erasmus Morton and Steed sitting behind the news desk in the studio. On the blue and orange grid behind them the letters "IFA" have replaced the letters "CNC." Erasmus Morton explains that IFA stands for Independent Field Advisor, a person who can make a lot of money by talking to people about Clientèle Life. The scene changes to that of a young white lady, dressed in fashionable khaki three-quarter pants and blackish top, seen talking to people about Clientèle Life. The scene changes back to Steed and Erasmus Morton in the studio. She is seen giving Steed some IFA forms to complete. After another change of scene the upper half of a white female in an office setting is seen. She is dressed in a grey and floral shirt, talking to the TV viewers about the Saver Endowment Plan "where you save money and use it the way you want." The scene again changes to Steed and Erasmus Morton in the studio, talking to the TV viewers about the different products of Clientèle Life, stressing the advantages of Clientèle Life "where you pay as little as from 50 cents per day." At the end of the Clientèle Life Infomercial their images fade and recede into the distance as if flying, and the CNC logo appears as the final image on the screen.

## The Clientèle Life Homepage

The homepage of Clientèle Life opens in two vertically adjacent frames as shown in Figure 32 below:

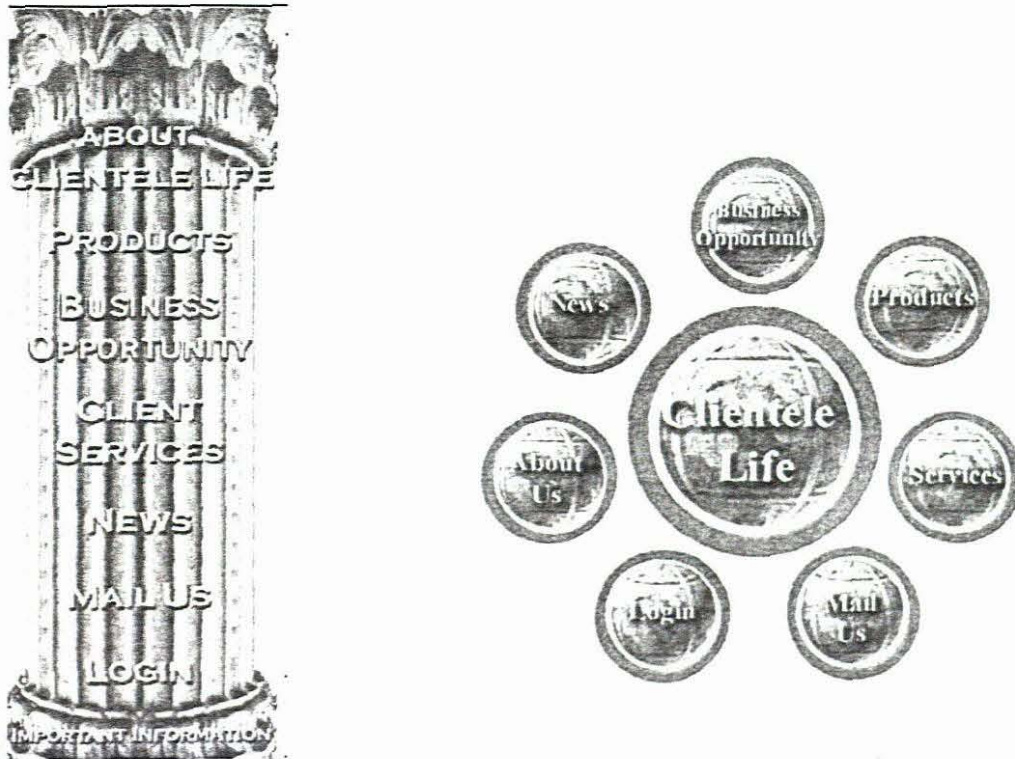


Figure 32: The Clientèle Life splash page (Used with permission of Clientèle Life)

The smaller, leftmost frame shows a classical Greek style brown-and-white marble pillar, with live the following links organised down the pillar to pages containing further information: *About Us*, *Products*, *Business Opportunity*, *Clients*, *News*, *Mail Us*, *Login* and *Important Information*.

On the central frame of the homepage the same links appear as smallish brown metallic buttons within brown circles, arranged around a bigger Clientèle Life button. Either the “About Us” brass button or the words “About Clientèle Life” on the pillar are live links to a page that contains more information about the company.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I briefly outlined the Infomercial production process, characterised South African Infomercials as forms of direct marketing that use multi-selling channels. I

showed that in contrast with the USA, where telemarketing is the most prominent form of direct marketing, Infomercials are the preferred medium in South Africa. I further showed that Infomercials only succeed as persuasive events if prospective customers order and pay for the products that are promoted in this way.

After identifying the radio and TV stations that transmitted infomercials, as well as their transmission schedules, I discussed five companies that use TV Infomercials to promote their products. I briefly characterised one Infomercial from each of them, as well as the website from which their products can be purchased online. In the next chapter I will focus on one company, SA Natural Products, and its innovative radio and TV infomercials.

## Chapter 7

### SA NATURAL PRODUCTS

#### INFORMATION NETWORKS WITHIN INFORMATION NETWORKS

#### ORIENTATION

In this chapter I will focus on the company SA Natural Products (SANP). I will outline the mission and history of SANP, as well as its organisation, operational procedures and future planning. I will also look at the forms of communication employed by SANP to promote its products and to sustain its operations. I will in particular document and analyse typical SANP radio and TV Infomercials for the product **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**. The company has been selected for special profiling for the following reasons:

The company's campaigns to promote **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** constitute an excellent example of how information networks can operate within information networks to sustain an infomercial;

SANP is pioneering a new form of infomercial—the *serial infomercial*—that is bound to be emulated by others in the Infomercial industry;

When approached with the request that I spend some time at its headquarters to systematically observe their business principles and practices SANP immediately responded positively in contrast with other companies who either hesitated or did not respond at all.

My analysis of SANP is based on my participative observation of how they put their business principles into practice at their headquarters, situated in Drummond, a village in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, halfway between Durban and Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. I made these observations from 16-20 October 2000, and followed them up with periodic visits to SANP subsequently, always encountering openness and a willingness to assist. My observations included observing staff meetings, planning sessions, accompanying the director of marketing on promotional visits to pharmacies

and observing the preparations that preceded the recording of the infomercial, as well as my observation of the actual transmission of the Infomercial in the form of a 5-minute, live, phone-in broadcast over Radio Metro in the SABC's Durban studios.

## **SPIRULINA**

In this section I will summarise various aspects of the Spirulina algae, based on the most recent promotional information available in printed literature and on the Internet. In a subsequent section I will outline recent and current biomedical research about its reputed benefits.

### **Spirulina algae**



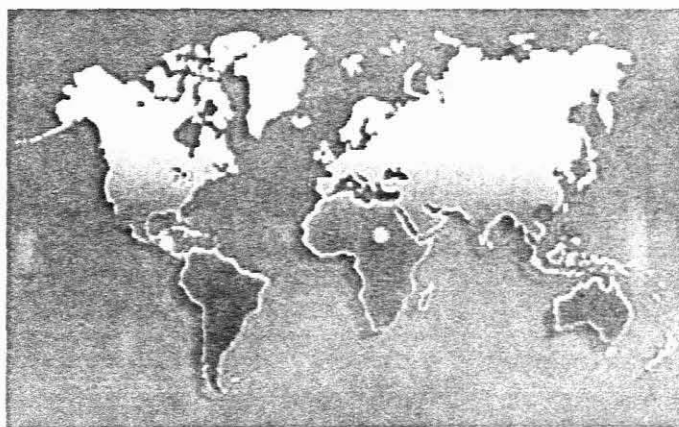
Figure 33: Spirulina algae (Used with permission of Marcus Rohrer)

According to information on the website of the company *HolisticOnLine* (at <http://www.holisticonline.com/HerbalMed/Herbs/h324.htm>) Spirulina is the botanical name of a tiny bluish-green variety of elongated, spiral shaped algae, shown in Figure 33. These algae belong to a more extensive group of 1,500 species of microscopic

aquatic plants. These algae are about half a millimetre in length. The name "Spirulina" is derived from its Latin cognate, which means "little spiral." Spirulina algae have been growing on earth for the past 3½ million years.

### **Where Spirulina comes from**

According to the Spirulina producer, Marcus Rohrer, as quoted on the SANP website at <http://www.sanaturalproducts.co.za/html/spirulina.htm#1> Spirulina algae can only thrive in extremely alkaline water (requiring a pH level of approximately 9-11 in, comparison with the human biosystem that requires a pH level of approximately 5).



- Areas where Spirulina grows naturally
- Areas where Spirulina is cultivated

Figure 34: Areas where Spirulina grows naturally and where it is cultivated (Used with permission of Marcus Rohrer)

As can be seen in the world map in Figure 34. Spirulina occurs naturally in the soda rich waters of Lake Chad in Africa, 280 metres above sea level and in Lake Texcoco 2,750 meters above sea level, in the northern part of the Mexican highlands. Mexico as shown by the yellow markers on the accompanying world map. Today,

Spirulina is cultivated in special water-farms in tropical and subtropical regions. The most important farms are in Hawaii, California, Thailand, Taiwan, India and China as indicated by the red markers on the same map. The two most common species used for human consumption are *Spirulina maxima* and *Spirulina platensis*.

## The nutritional content of Spirulina

Biomedical research, some of which I will briefly review in a subsequent section, shows that Spirulina algae contain about 60 different natural substances that benefit human nutrition in one way or another. Among these substances are a variety of vitamins and minerals, all of the essential amino acids, some of the non-essential amino acids, chlorophyll, a variety of enzymes as well as antioxidants.

The nutritional information provided below has been taken from to the website MICROORGANICS at [http://www.microrganics.com/What\\_Is.html](http://www.microrganics.com/What_Is.html) Spirulina contains a rich spectrum of available proteins and is the richest source of beta-carotene and mixed carotenoids in the world.

According to this website Spirulina is nature's richest whole-food source of complete protein consisting of approximately 65 to 70 percent protein, depending on growing conditions.

Spirulina is rich in GLA, important B complex vitamins and naturally occurring vitamin E, along with Calcium, Iron and other essential chelated minerals and trace elements.

Spirulina is presented as nature's richest whole-food source of the entire anti-oxidant spectrum including: beta-carotene, vitamin E, selenium, methionine, cysteine, super oxide dismutase, glutathionine Peroxides, copper, manganese, zinc, vitamins B-1, B-2, B-3, B-5, B-6 and Biotin, a vitamin of the B complex group. It is the only known source of phycocyanin, an immune stimulant. Spirulina is nature's richest whole food source of biochelated organic iron. It's 58 times richer than raw spinach and 28 times richer than raw beef liver. Spirulina is also rich in Vitamin B12, the most difficult of all vitamins to obtain from vegetable sources, containing 250 % more than beef liver, previously thought to be nature's richest source.

Spirulina is nature's richest known source of vitamin E. It is three times higher than raw wheat germ, and its action in the body is 49% greater than that of synthetic vitamin E.

Spirulina is also nature's richest known source of beta-carotene (pro-vitamin A). It contains 25 times more beta-carotene than raw carrots. Beta-carotene in Spirulina is completely non-toxic, even in mega doses.

Spirulina is also nature's richest known source of gamma linolenic acid (GLA). The polyunsaturated oils in Spirulina contain 21% GLA.

## **Spirulina Pacifica**

Spirulina Pacifica is a select strain of *Spirulina platensis* developed over many years of continuous cultivation in Hawaii. Spirulina Pacifica has been extensively analysed by molecular biologists at the University of Hawaii who identified unique enzymes not previously found in other strains of *Spirulina platensis*.

Because Spirulina can accumulate heavy metals such as lead, mercury and cadmium from contaminated water people should take care to consume Spirulina that has been grown and harvested under controlled conditions.

## **RESEARCH ABOUT THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF SPIRULINA**

In this section I will briefly report a number of results of credible clinical trials on the preventative effects of Spirulina, mainly based on a reference search conducted through *BioMedNet* at <http://research.bmn.com/medline/search>. These results are reported to pro-

vide a background for the health and wellness claims made in Spirulina promotional literature.

The results that I report in this section should be read with due caution, because they mostly report a range of positive effects of Spirulina in mouse, rat and hamster trials. Using the universality principle in nature as point of departure (i.e. carbon will have the same molecular structure everywhere in the universe, planets revolve around suns not suns around planets, organ-specific animal cells function similarly) one can to some extent make the extrapolation that what's good for the mouse is good for man. However, human metabolisms cannot be straightforwardly equated to rodent metabolisms. More human trials are required to determine the effects of Spirulina on human subjects. In the long run subjective testimonials, solicited or unsolicited, cannot substitute for rigorous, objective testing of how Spirulina affects the people that take it as a nutritional supplement.

### **The effects of Spirulina on allergic reactions in mice**

According to Hayashi et al 1998 their investigation of antibody productions of IgA and other classes, such as IgE and IgG1, in mice show evidence of the protective effects of Spirulina toward food allergy and microbial infection. They report that an increase of IgE antibody level in the blood serum was observed in the mice that were orally immunized with crude shrimp extract as an antigen (Ag group). The antibody level, however, was not further enhanced by treatment with Spirulina extract (SpHW). IgG1 antibody, on the other hand, which was increased by antigen administration, was further enhanced by Spirulina extract. Their results suggest that Spirulina may at least neither induce nor enhance allergic reaction such as food allergy dependent on an IgE antibody, and that when ingested both concurrently with antigens and before antigen stimulation, the use of Spirulina may significantly enhance the IgA antibody level to protect against allergic reaction.

Kim et al 1998 report the results of their investigation of the effect of Spirulina on mast cell-mediated immediate-type allergic reactions in rats. According to them Spirulina dose-dependently inhibited the systemic allergic reaction induced by compound 48/80. Spirulina inhibited compound 48/80-induced allergic reaction 100% with doses of 100-1000 microgram per gram of body weight. Spirulina in lower doses of 10-1000 micrograms per gram of body weight also significantly inhibited local allergic reaction activated by anti-dinitrophenyl (DNP) IgE. When rats were pre-treated with Spirulina at a concentra-



tion ranging from 0.01 to 1000 micrograms per gram of body weight, the serum histamine levels were reduced in a dose-dependent manner. Kim et al's results indicate that regular and constant *Spirulina* intake inhibits mast cell-mediated immediate-type allergic reactions.

### **The effect of *Spirulina* on rat aortas**

Paredes-Carbajal et al 2001 report that a raw ethanolic extract of *Spirulina maxima* (dietary *Spirulina*) decreases the effect of constricting substances in rat aortas, while it at the same time increases the effectiveness of increases the effect of substances that dilate these blood vessels. Their results suggest that *Spirulina* intake regulates dilation and constriction in rat aortas because it increases the synthesis and release of vasco-dilating nitrous oxide (NO) in the endothelium layer of the aorta, as well as the synthesis and release of a vasco-constricting prostanoid in vascular smooth muscle cells.

### **The effect of *Spirulina* on diabetic mice**

Rodríguez-Hernández et al 2001 report the beneficial results the dietary administration of 5% *Spirulina maxima* during a four-week trial on diabetic mice. The trial started one week after a single dose of alloxan, at strength 250 mg per Kg of body weight, was administered to the mice to induce diabetes. This dose prevented fatty liver production in male and female animals. The main action of *Spirulina maxima* was on triacylglycerol levels in serum and liver. There was also a moderate hypoglycemia in male mice. The thio-barbituric acid reactive substances also decreased in serum and liver after SM administration. There was also a decrease in the percentage of HDL in diabetic mice that was reverted by the *Spirulina maxima* administration. The sum of LDL + VLDL percentages was also partially normalized in diabetic animals by the SM administration. An additional observation was the lower incidence of adherences between the liver and the intestine loops in the diabetic mice treated with *Spirulina maxima* compared with diabetic mice without *Spirulina maxima*. Male and female mice showed differences to diabetes susceptibility and response to *Spirulina maxima*, the female being more resistant to diabetes induction by alloxan and more responsive to the beneficial effects of. Rodríguez-Hernández et al recommend human trials testing the effect of *Spirulina maxima* on humans suffering from diabetes with the aim of looking for better quality of life and longer survival of diabetic patients.

## The anti-carcinogenic effects of Spirulina on mice

Dasgupta et al 2001 report that Spirulina consumption has a “carcinogen detoxification” effect in 7-week-old Swiss albino mice that were subject to fore-stomach tumours induced by benzo(a)pyrene and skin tumours induced by dimethylbenz(a)anthracene (DMBA). Dasgupta et al report that there was a significant inhibition of “tumor burden as well as tumor incidence in both the tumor model systems studied.” In the skin tumour studies tumour burden was reduced from 4.86 to 1.20 and 1.15 by the low dose treatment and high dose treatment respectively. In stomach tumour studies tumour burden was 2.05 and 1.73 by the low dose treatment and high dose treatments with Spirulina, against 3.73 for control subjects.

## The immuno-boosting effects of Spirulina on humans

Hirahashi et al 2002 report that *Spirulina platensis* is widely considered to give the human immune system the ability to suppress cancer development and viral infection. The authors report having identified the molecular mechanism of the *human* immune enabling capacity of Spirulina. They did this by analysing blood cells of volunteers with pre and post oral administration of hot water extract of Spirulina. These observations indicated that in humans Spirulina acts directly on myeloid lineages and either directly or indirectly on NK body cells.



Figure 35: Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer® (Used with permission of Marcus Rohrer)

### SPIRULINA BY MARCUS ROHRER®

Although SANP markets a range of natural food supplements and homeopathic medicines, I will mainly focus on the Informercials and other strategies of SANP to promote the product, **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**, which, according to statistics provided by SANP, has become one of the three fastest selling over-the-counter products of

the *Dischem* pharmacy chain in South Africa. In this section I will provide information about this product. The packaged product is shown in Figure 35 above.

According to Marcus Rohrer,<sup>8</sup> he uses *Spirulina Pacifica*, derived from *Spirulina platensis* to manufacture **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**.

At the product's official website at <http://www.spirulina-mr.com/> Rohrer in paragraph form lists the following feel-good advantages of *Spirulina* consumption:

**Rise and shine with pure sun energy!**

*Spirulina* by Marcus Rohrer promotes natural cleansing processes, boosts resistance and increases vitality. Ideal for fatigue, convalescence, strenuous exercise and improved performance in work, sport and study.

**A wealth of benefits:**

- Gives you more energy
- Boosts your resistance
- Improves your performance in work, sport and study
- Increases your stamina
- Speeds up recovery after illness
- For healthy skin, fuller hair and stronger nails
- Builds up your strength during menstruation and menopause
- Supplementation during and after pregnancy
- As a natural slimming aid

In contrast with the *Spirulina* trials that I reported in the previous section, that clinically state the effects of *Spirulina* ingestion in terms of medical conditions—anti-allergic, anti-carcinogenic, etc—Rohrer begins his persuasive appeal with the well known metaphor “Rise and shine with pure sun energy!” People have probably for millennia been equating an energetic start to a new day with the image of the rising sun, but this metaphor gains additional significance because of Rohrer's explanation that certain foods literally provide more sun energy when eaten, and that *Spirulina* tops the list of foods with low calorific value and high bio-energetic value.

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<sup>8</sup> In a personal communication by e-mail dated 3 July 2002.

In paragraph format Rohrer then persuasively highlights Spirulina as a lifestyle enhancing supplement that will bring relief against a variety of present-day symptoms of modern living that people suffer from—feeling ill after overindulgence or a prolonged unhealthy lifestyle (Spirulina promotes natural cleansing processes), proneness to viral infections (Spirulina boosts resistance and increases vitality), feeling overworked (Spirulina is ideal for fatigue, ideal for improved performance in work), boosting stamina (Spirulina is ideal for strenuous exercise, improved performance in work, sport and study).

Directly below the paragraph Rohrer subtly reinforces his message by restating the same list in bulleted format, but adding that taking Spirulina will improve the appearance of skin, hair and nails, that it builds strength “during” menstruation and menopause (when many females actually feel ill, weak and nauseous), that it is a good (food) supplement for pregnant women and that it naturally promotes slimming.

## SA NATURAL PRODUCTS PTY LTD



### The company behind the Infomercials

SA Natural Products has the following Mission & History statement on its homepage at <http://www.sanaturalproducts.co.za>:

*SA Natural Products is a distributor of natural medicines and associated products.*

*Irma and Louis Schutte founded the company in November 1988 with the vision to become the first exclusive company of its kind in South Africa. Right from inception we have exceeded our growth expectations. The formation of the Western Cape and Gauteng branches advanced the company's stature to a truly national force with an unsurpassed range of the best quality natural products available.*

*Aggressive, focused strategic planning and precise marketing has given birth to numerous household brands within the South African Natural Market. Brands such as Thursday Plantation Tea Tree Products, Tonalin™CLA80, Rice Dream Beverages, Orgran Foods, Breathe Right™ Nasal Strips, Thresh Hold™ with OptiMSM™ and Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer™ are but a few.*

*Recent investment and shareholding in the company by O.T.C Pharma International, has reinforced our trading position. Numerous exciting new products are constantly being researched and, if accepted, will be launched on the South African Market.*

*We at SA Natural Products will always stay true to our motto and promise:*

***"We Bring Quality Life To The World"***

*(Used with permission of SA Natural Products)*

The above quoted concise History & Mission statement of SANP reveals a spirit of optimism, focused management of the public profile of a limited range of carefully selected products, a strong belief in the capacity of the company to set, pursue and achieve strategic objectives by means of a range of innovative business practices, a sense of direction, a belief that the betterment of the lives of others is a worthy foundation for its business objectives, a company with a strong commitment to ideals that go well beyond the profit motive.

SANP, essentially still a family concern, has grown from a cottage industry, managed from a family home in rural Drummond in KwaZulu-Natal, in the late 1980s to a national company with headquarters in a modern multi-story office block on the same premises—a company that has achieved a strong national business profile in 2002 because its products are known and increasingly used in households of all race groups, available in pharmacies all over the country, with major chain stores negotiating to stock them as well. A mark of SANP's success is that it started off by selling *Bioforce* natural remedies in the 1980s, but that its operations have now grown to the extent that SANP now outright owns *Bioforce South Africa*.

## SANP: THE ORGANISATION

### Family Matters

The primary network that sustains the product, **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** is the network of family relationships within SANP. SANP is a privately owned company, made up of two major divisions, SANP Pharma and SANP Distribution. In the previous section I characterised SANP as a *family concern*. In the *Pharma and Distribution organograms* that I respectively present as Figures 36 and 37 on the following two pages, I highlight the family relationships within the company by means of colour coding:

- The same colour text boxes denote sibling relations;
- The same coloured box frames denotes parent-child relations;
- Broken lines in box frames denote spousal relations.
- A text box containing the name of a particular individual, appearing more than once denotes that the individual is employed in multiple capacities at the SANP division.

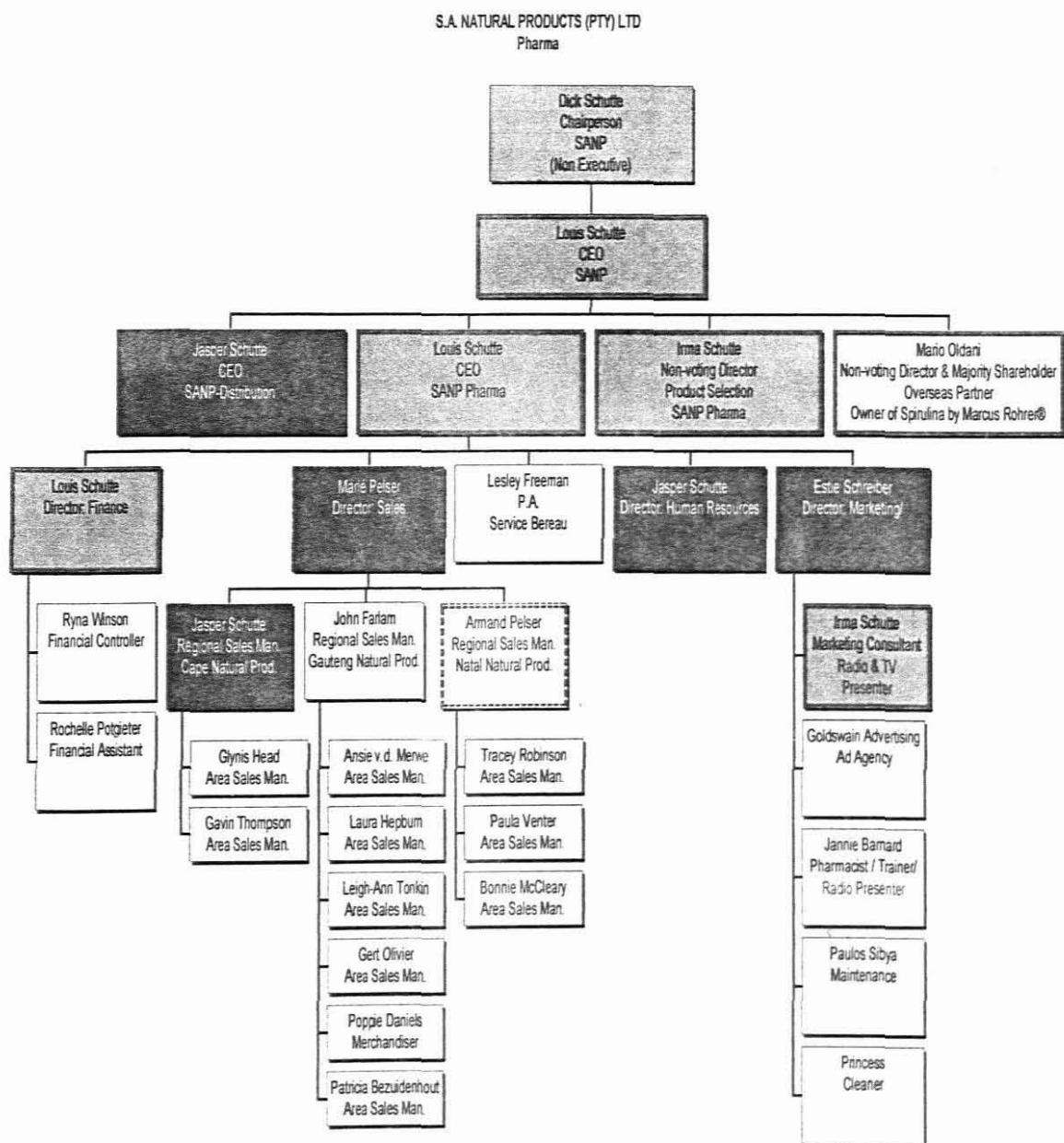


Figure 36: Organogram of SANP Pharma division (Used with permission of SA Natural Products)

### Family relationships in SANP Pharma

SANP consists of two divisions, SANP Pharma and SANP Distribution. Because SANP essentially is a family concern the same individuals in the higher ranks of the company wear different organisational hats in the two divisions.

The two topmost sky-blue sibling boxes in Figure 37 above show that Dick Schutte, the Chairperson of SANP and Louis Schutte, the CEO of SANP are brothers, while two other sky-blue boxes show that Louis is involved in three management roles in SANP

Pharma, namely as CEO of SANP as a whole, as CEO of SANP Pharma, and as Director of Finance of SANP Pharma.

Next to the text box of Louis Schutte on the third level from the top is the red-rimmed sky-blue text box of Irma Schutte, also a practicing homeopath, designating her as the Director of product selection. Two levels down, on the right hand side of the organogram is another text box, designating Irma Schutte as Product Advisor to her daughter, the Director of Marketing, Estie Schreiber. The sky-blue colour coding of both text boxes identifies her as a relative to the Chairperson, Dick Schutte (former sister in-law) and the CEO Louis Schutte (former wife). The red rim of the text boxes identifies her as the mother of Jasper Schutte, Marié Pelser and Estie Schreiber, and as the mother in-law of Armand Pelser. The organogram also shows Irma Schutte in a dual capacity. Firstly, she is SANP's non-voting Director of Product Selection. Secondly, she is a Marketing Consultant to her daughter, Estie Schreiber.

The royal blue text boxes show that Jasper Schutte, Marié Pelser and Estie Schreiber are brother and sisters, and that Jasper represents SANP Distribution in SANP Pharma, as well as being the Director of Human Resources of SANP Distribution. The broken-lined red frame shows that Marie and Armand Pelser are husband and wife. The red frames show that Louis Schutte is the father of Jasper Schutte, Marié Pelser and Estie Schreiber, and the father-in-law of Armand Pelser.

At directorial level the yellow text box designates Mario Oldani a businessperson from the Netherlands. Oldani is the sole owner of the company that manufactures **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**, as well as a non-voting Director and majority shareholder in SANP. is the odd figure when it comes to family relationships. At directorial level Oldani is the odd one out with regards to the network of family relationships that characterises SANP.

### ***Family relationships in SANP Distribution***

The two topmost sky blue sibling text boxes in the SANP Distribution organogram in Figure 37 (on the next page) again show that Dick Schutte, the Chairperson of SANP and Louis Schutte the CEO of SANP are brothers. The third sky blue text box shows that Louis Schutte also represents SANP Pharma in SANP Distribution. The green frames show that Dick Schutte, the Chairperson of SANP is also the father of Rieta Schutte, Direc-



tor of Gauteng SANP and manageress of one of the its branches. The red frame shows that Louis Schutte is the father of Jasper Schutte, the CEO of SANP Distribution. The broken lined red frames show that Jasper Schutte and Thea Schutte, Director of Cape Natural Products, are husband and wife, and that Thea therefore is the daughter-in-law of Louis Schutte.

The purple broken lined frames indicate that Shawnee Du Preez, Parcel Despatch Clerk in the Gauteng warehouse and Etienne du Preez, warehouse assistant and driver are husband and wife. The yellow text box marks Fiona Schreiber, driver, as Estie Schreiber's mother-in-law of and co-parent-in-law, along with Louis Schutte, CEO of SANP.

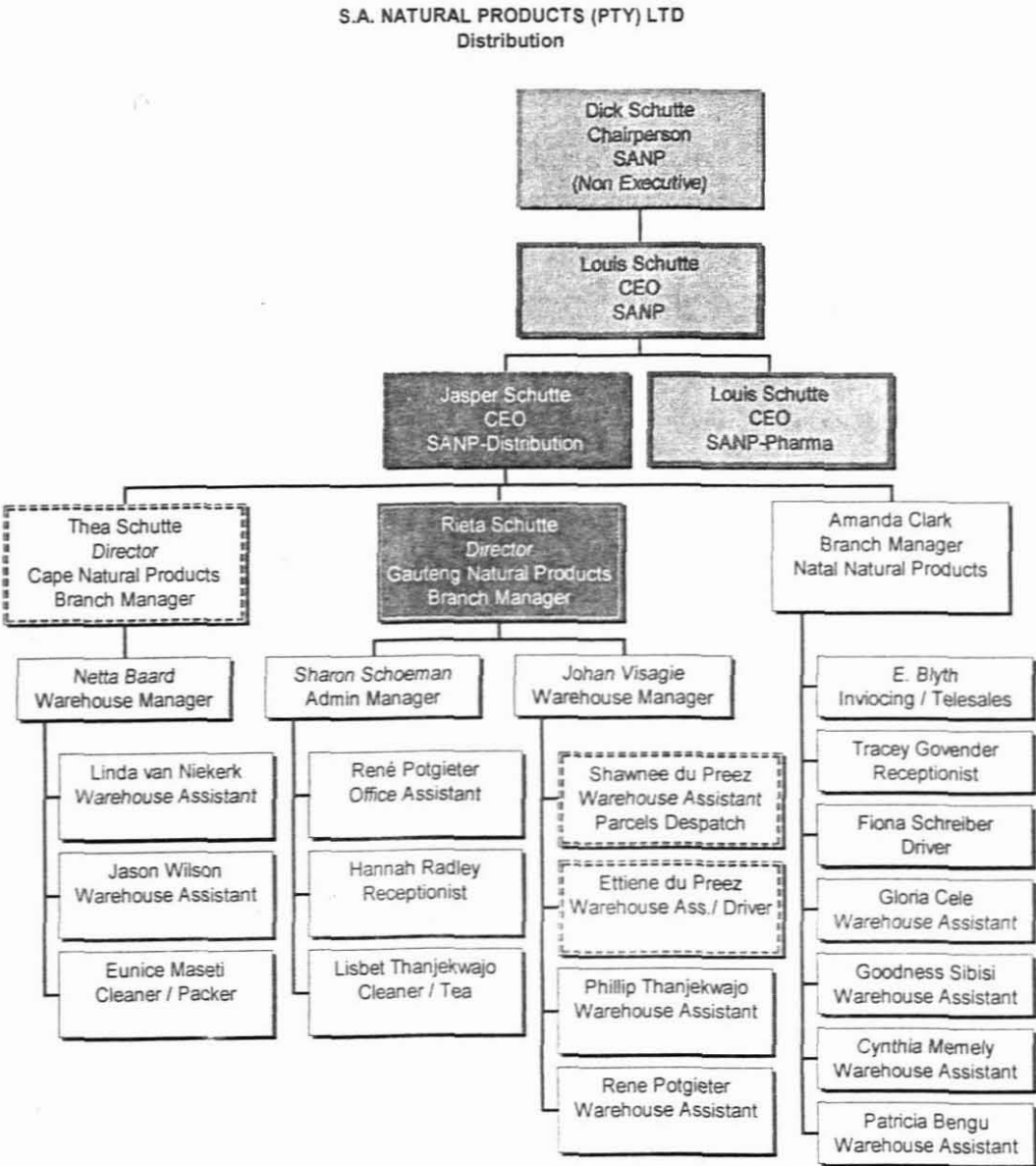


Figure 37: Organogram of SANP Distribution division (Used with permission of SA Natural Products)

From the point of view of loyalty to the company the networks within networks of family relationships that I have outlined, are extremely important, because what one has in these instances are bonds of family relations superimposed on an organisational communication network, a combination that can lend cohesiveness and commonness of purpose as long as sibling rivalry and other forms of family discord do not intrude on business interactions.

## **SANP BUSINESS ETHICS**

When visiting the SANP website it is noticeable that the company provides ample information about itself and its products, including links to other websites that report current research on its products, but that no direct sales are made at the website. SANP therefore does not directly sell its own products by means of an online virtual store like the other companies who promote their products by means of infomercials. When I asked SANP management about this, Louis Schutte, the general CEO of SANP, and CEO of SANP Pharma, explained that loyalty is a dual relationship, which meant the SANP also had to be loyal to pharmacies and health food shops that stocked its products. Therefore SANP, as a wholesaler, has taken a conscious decision that it would not compete with its clients, pharmacies and health food shops. Louis Schutte further explained that SANP had for a number of years turned down the request by the discounter, Clicks, to stock SANP products in order to protect pharmacies, but that SANP have been supplying two of its best selling products, *Spirulina* and *Tonalin* to Clicks SA at the same prices as to pharmacies since September 2001 since Clicks acquired about a third of the pharmacies in South Africa.

### **Stations that transmit SANP radio Infomercials**

SANP currently transmits its serial radio Infomercials in English and Afrikaans on the following South African stations:

- **East Coast Radio:** a half an hour segment every Friday evening from 19h30 – 20h00, with the SANP segment under the title *Medical File* with Estie Schreiber as spokesperson, as part of the SABC programme *Living Naturally*.

- **Lotus FM:** presently a five-minute feature, soon to be a half an hour one, every Tuesday morning 09h30 on *Body Beautiful* with Estie Schreiber as the spokesperson.
- **Lotus FM:** a half an hour segment, from 09:30 to 10:00, on the last Monday of every month as part of *Medical File* with Irma Schutte as the spokesperson.
- **Good Hope FM:** a ten-minute feature every Tuesday from 11:30 to 11:40 under the *Health* feature with Estie Schreiber as spokesperson.
- **Radio Sonder Grense:** a five minute feature in Afrikaans every Saturday at 12h05, as part of the programme *Radiomark* (Radio Market), with Estie Schreiber and Irma Schutte alternating as spokespersons.
- **Radio Pretoria:** a ten min segment every Monday and Wednesday with Jannie Barnard, the SANP Pharmacist as spokesperson.
- **Radio Pretoria:** a forty-five minute health feature every last Thursday of the month on the programme *Vrouevreug* (Women's Joy) from 09:00 to 09:45 with Estie Schreiber and Jannie Barnard alternating as spokespersons.

SANP's Director of Marketing indicated that future contracts are being negotiated with the following radio stations: P4 – KZN, P4 – Cape Town, Radio Algoa – Eastern Cape, Radio OFM – Free State, 702 – JHB, Radio KFM – Cape Town, Ukhozi FM – National.

According to the Director of Marketing of SANP the company appreciates importance of non-English speaking clients for its current and future success in South Africa. Therefore it also advertises its products by means of Afrikaans infomercials, and it is in the process of translating all its product brochures into isiZulu. Towards the end of 2002 the isiZulu brochures will be sent in response to queries that SANP receives after the transmission of its Ukhozi FM infomercials. During the Infomercials listeners will be asked to write to SANP via e-mail, post or fax to receive the information that they require.

## The SANP serial radio & TV infomercials: an innovation on the traditional Infomercial

Traditional Infomercials are single narrative units, pre-recorded in a single language, usually English, for repeated TV transmissions. From start to finish a typical TV Infomercial lasts 30 minutes. SANP has innovated by producing radio as well as TV infomercials, by presenting its radio Infomercials in both English and Afrikaans, and by producing a series of short, thematically interlinked Infomercials for which the term *serial Infomercial* is best suited.

SANP's radio Infomercials are presented in 5-minute, 8-minute, 10-minute and 15-minute weekly sessions, and in 30-minute and 45-minute monthly sessions. The majority of them are live transmissions, and during some of them the public can phone in to ask questions and give comments or testimonials about the product or topic, which is being discussed.

There are two basic patterns to these infomercials. They have in common the feature that at the beginning and end of each Infomercial SANP is mentioned as sponsor of the information being provided in the infomercial, but differ with regard to the topics that they focus on. In the first type of serial Infomercial the SANP spokesperson focuses on a single aspect of a particular SANP product during each recording session or live transmission. A further aspect of the product forms the focus of each subsequent transmission. In this way different facets of the product are progressively being profiled over the course of time. Typically, a first instalment of the series will focus on the nature and benefits of a product, with subsequent instalments respectively dealing with how the product is produced naturally, who can safely take it, what forms of medication it can safely be taken with, new research on its efficacy, etc.

In the second type of serial Infomercial the SANP spokesperson gives advice on a particular health related topic without promoting any particular SANP product. Because these Infomercials are perceived as being altruistic public service information sessions they build strong credibility for SANP as a socially responsible company for whom the profit motive is not their sole concern.

## Preparation for a typical SANP radio Infomercial

SANP uses three spokespersons for its radio infomercials, Estie Schreiber, Irma Schutte, and a pharmacist, Jannie Barnard. I will characterise the preparation and presentation for a radio Infomercial presented by Estie Schreiber.

The afternoon before the actual studio interview between the SANP spokesperson, Estie Schreiber, and the SABC broadcaster of the radio station that will do the transmission, she prepares questions, either extracted from letters received at SANP headquarters, or from questions asked by phone-in participants during the previous week's radio session. After compiling the list of questions, Estie Schreiber round robins them to particular colleagues at SANP headquarters for assessment, comments and suggestions.

In some instances she faxes the finalised list of questions to the broadcaster the day before the broadcast. In instances where she had not done this, Estie Schreiber will confer with the broadcaster in the studio a few minutes before the program goes on air. This essentially is a strategy session during which the list of questions, and the topics that emerged during the previous broadcast are discussed to establish rapport between her and the broadcaster before the broadcast goes on air.

In the broadcast session that I attended as an observer the Infomercial focused on the product, **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**. Estie Schreiber and the female Indian broadcaster agreed that the previous broadcast focussed on the importance of taking the food supplement Spirulina on a daily basis and that in the current broadcast they would focus on the inherent safety of taking Spirulina. They also agreed that the current broadcast would focus on the fact that Spirulina is not medication, but a concentrated natural food supplement, made from a particular alga, packaged in pill form, that could benefit the whole family.

The list of questions that the broadcaster was going to ask on behalf of the listeners, contained questions like:

How safe it is to take Spirulina everyday?

Are there any side effects when one takes Spirulina?

From what age must one begin to take Spirulina?

As the infomercial, which lasted only five minutes, went on air the broadcaster introduced her guest as, “Estie Schreiber from SANP who has come to talk about Spirulina, continuing from where she ended previously.” In turn Estie Schreiber greeted and welcomed the listeners to the program. While she was still summarising the topic of the previous week—the importance of taking Spirulina every day—the broadcaster, as planned in the pre-broadcast strategy session, requested her to stop for a minute because she wanted to ask some things about the product. She wanted to know how safe it is to take Spirulina every day, as well as what the right age is to begin taking Spirulina.

Estie Schreiber explained to the listeners that taking Spirulina regularly is the same as eating healthy food every day. As a result all members of the family, starting from unborn babies in the mother’s womb to grandparents, can take Spirulina for the benefit of their health because one cannot expect to have good health if one is not eating healthy food. She further explained that there are no side effects in taking the product. She gave the company address, telephone number and e-mail address to listeners who were taking Spirulina and had questions or comments, and for listeners who were not taking the product, but who also had questions about it. After this Estie Schreiber gave a thumbs-up signal to the female broadcaster, indicating her satisfaction with the broadcast.

Thereafter the broadcaster thanked the SA Natural Product representative and repeated the address, telephone number and e-mail address, and promised that both of them would be back at the same time the following week.

## **SANP’s TV SERIAL INFOMERCIALS**

SANP follows a two-track strategy with its two-minute and five-minute TV serial infomercials, transmitted in Afrikaans over the DSTV channel *kykNET*. The first track entails that Irma Schutte gives general health care advice on particular aspects of healthy living—based on her experience as a homeopath—under the sponsorship of SANP. The second track entails that Estie Schreiber in a separate series of two-minute infomercials, transmitted on another day, promotes specific products imported by SANP, such as **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**, **Tonalin CLA™** and **Thresh Hold™ OptiMSM™**.

## Irma Schutte's TV serial Infomercials

Sitting down behind a golden-brown wooden table, with heavy set natural wooden windows forming the backdrop, Irma Schutte knowledgeably and confidently talks in a conversational style about commonsense aspects of returning to the healthier style of eating and living of yesteryear. In each episode of the serial Infomercial she focuses on a particular theme like the natural cleansing and health promoting function of drinking just plain water rather than drinking commercial beverages, including fruit juices that she revealed to temporarily suppress the immune system immediately after being ingested, the importance of eating a variety of fresh vegetables, particularly those from the green and yellow groups, the importance of regular moderate exercise, and the importance of eating fibre rich porridges for breakfast rather than commercially produced breakfast cereals.

There is a subtle symbiotic relationship between the apparently independent radio and TV talks of Irma and Estie Schreiber. Irma Schutte's non-promotional commonsense radio and TV talks on health matters lend high credibility for and goodwill towards SANP as her sponsor. This credibility transfers to product-specific promotional radio and TV talks that Estie Schreiber gives as a SANP spokesperson on separate occasions.

## Estie Schreiber's TV serial Infomercials

Sitting down behind a golden-brown wooden table on which the different packaging formats of Spirulina are displayed, Estie Schreiber animatedly and confidently speaks about a specific aspect of the product in each two-minute segment of the serial infomercial. In the first segment she briefly outlines the health benefits of **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**, before she continues to give information about the specific alga that the tablets are made of. In a subsequent two-minute segment she explains that Spirulina is a natural food supplement that cannot clash with any medication that a person is taking, that it can be safely used by all, from premature babies who are given it along with mothers' milk, to athletes, or people who want to ensure that they follow a balanced diet. In yet another segment Estie Schreiber describes how Spirulina is harvested, and the crucial role of the product's Viosol glass jar in preventing the deterioration of the product by permitting only rays from the ultraviolet spectrum of sunlight to enter the jar in order to retain the energy that the alga absorbed from the sun in their natural state prior to being harvested. In two separate segments Estie Schreiber talks about how Spirulina and another SANP product, ThreshHold, and Spirulina and Tonalin complement one another.

## **SANP AS OFFICIAL NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENT SUPPLIER TO THE COMRADES MARATHON UNDER THE SPIRULINA BY MARCUS ROHRER® BRAND NAME**

According to SANP's director of Sales, Marié Pelser, since the launch of **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** in South Africa in 1999, this product has become the over the counter food supplement with the third highest sales in the Dischem pharmacy chain, largely due to a variety of coordinated and innovative promotional campaigns over the radio, TV, in print media advertisements, on billboards, and in the form of a three-year agreement with the SA Comrades Marathon organisers to be an official supplier of nutritional supplements along with the manufacturers of the energy drink PowerAde.

According to SANP's Director of Marketing, Estie Schreiber, the company continually assesses the impact of their marketing strategies. An example of this is when the company noticed an increase of Spirulina sales among sportspeople just subsequent to the 2001 Comrades Marathon, accompanied by a levelling off of Spirulina sales among ordinary members of the public. Further research revealed that SANP's concerted campaign to promote Spirulina among sportspersons was creating the perception among ordinary people that Spirulina was a supplement for athletes, not for ordinary people. After subsequent promotional campaigns stressed that Spirulina was a product that benefited everyone, from sportspersons to ordinary people, the sales of Spirulina then increased to their previous levels among ordinary people.

## **A PAINFUL PROMOTIONAL MISCALCULATION**

Not all of SANP's promotional campaigns are equally successful. By contrast with the above-mentioned highly successful Spirulina campaigns, SANP experienced a setback when introducing a new product in 2000 under the brand name *Painaway*, the name for it in several overseas markets. South African competitors in the pharmaceutical industry however lodged an official complaint with the South African Medicines Control Council that the name *Painaway* constituted a medical claim (pain relief) for a non-registered medical product. When the complaint was upheld SANP had to go through the costly exercise of recalling all stocks from pharmacies and health food shops all over the country, registering and re-launching it as *ThreshHold*.



## SPORTS CLINICS

Due to requests from various sports clubs, after SANP started co-sponsoring the SA Comrades Marathon in 2000 under the **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** brand name, Estie Schreiber from SANP and Grant Webster, the founder of *Action Cricket SA*, conducted 28 regional sports clinics in 2001 at sports clubs across the country. The contribution that **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** and other SANP products could make to general well being and enhanced sports performance was emphasised during these clinics. The popularity of these clinics led to seven major countrywide clinics in 2002, facilitated by Ian Laxton, consultant for the SA Comrades Marathon, and presented by Estie Schreiber (SANP Marketing), Dennis Reeboch (podiatrist at Nike) and Norrie Williamson (Lecturer in Sports Nutrition at Durban Institute of Technology, sports coach and veteran of 17 Comrades Marathons).

## SANP AS AN OFFICIAL COMRADES MARATHON SUPPLIER

The annual South African Comrades is an internally renowned event on the calendar of long distance runners. It is run over a 90 km scenic route between Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The marathon is alternately run uphill and downhill. Most of the route traverses the leafy suburbs of Westville, Cowies Hill, Pinetown, Kloof, Gillitts, Winston Park, Hillcrest, and Bothas Hill and the spectacular Valley of a Thousand Hills.

The competition attracts in excess of 12,000 participants a year, with many of the gold and silver medal holders being from the ranks of accomplished international runners. An important feature of the event is that it is run on a South African public holiday, Youth Day, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, or on the following day if the 16<sup>th</sup> is on a Sunday. Because the Comrades Marathon is run on a public holiday, and the whole race is broadcast over the SABC's TV channel 2, it attracts a wide viewership. Against this background the public image of **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** was tremendously enhanced by SANP's decision to use this product as standard for profiling its association with the Comrades Marathon.

## MASAKHANE FOSTER CARE HOME

Iris Ndlela, a registered social worker, runs the *Masakhane Foster Care Home* in Diepkloof (Soweto, Johannesburg) where she takes in and cares for children that are increasingly neglected and abandoned as the HIV/AIDS pandemic fastens its grip on South African society. Iris Ndlela runs the foster home with government grants for the children

that she takes in and cares for until they are adopted. She herself has adopted three of the children under her care, and acts as an advisor to other parents who have adopted abandoned children.

Iris Ndlela came to SANP's notice when she wrote and reported what beneficial results she obtained by **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** part of the food intake of the children under her care. During the official inauguration of SANP's new headquarters (detailed under the next heading) Iris was one of the honoured guests. Estie Schreiber recounted how Iris invited her to visit the foster care home on one of her business trips to Johannesburg. On 19 February 2000 Estie Schreiber visited the foster care home and to her surprise encountered a crowd of about 1500 people who had come to hear her talk. After her talk about healthy living, and how **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** could promote good health, pharmacies in and around Soweto reported a marked increase in the sales of the product.

## THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW SANP HEADQUARTERS

On Saturday 15 June 2002 SANP inaugurated its new headquarters in Drummond, halfway between Durban and Pietermaritzburg, along the Old Main Road, in the Valley of a Thousand Hills—the route of the internationally subscribed annual Comrades Marathon of which SANP presently is an official supplier of nutritional supplements.

Louis Schutte, the CEO of SANP, opened the proceedings by individually acknowledging by name all persons who had contributed to the phenomenal success of SANP, from the members of his family to the gardener who tends the grounds. Louis Schutte in particular acknowledged the roles that his former wife Irma Schutte and his children, Jasper Schutte, Estie Schreiber, Marié Pelser, Naomi Fraser and Irma Schutte, have been playing in the success of SANP.

The keynote speaker, who officially opened the new headquarters, was George Bartlet, former Minister of Energy and Mining in the last National Party Government. Mr Bartlet was a participant in the *Codesa* negotiations that led to the peaceful transition from Apartheid to majority rule in 1994.

The new SANP headquarters is next to the original Schutte family home where the company was conceived and nurtured as a cottage industry. A measure of SANP's success is the fact that it now wholly owns *Bioforce South Africa*, the company whose product

range played a significant role in the successful launch of SANP in the late nineteen eighties.

## **CONTRACTING THE *SONNENBURG MURPHY LEO BURNETT* ADVERTISING AGENCY**

In July SANP spokesperson Estie Schreiber indicated that the company was reviewing the full message advertised to the SA public, and they have approached 4 advertising agencies to “pitch” for the account. Pitching entails that a company is first detailed on the product, followed by a brief, a timeframe and a budget. Companies who pitch for a contract make individual presentations to the hiring company who then selects the one best-suited agency.

By middle August 2002 SANP informed me that they had awarded the contract to the Johannesburg-based *Sonnenburg Murphy Leo Burnett* (SMLB) advertising agency to help plan and design its product promotions. SMLB is an international agency with clients in thirty countries that, according to its philosophy statement, is driven by ethical values—a brand belief system—that forms the basis of “a philosophy of treating brands as human beings in complete relationships with other human beings. ... It is through this approach, through treating Spirulina as a human being that, together, we will reach for the stars.”

While it is unclear what “a philosophy of treating brands as human beings” entails in practice, SANP and the SMLB are clearly on common ground with regard to the role that ethical values play when decisions have to be made.

## **SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MODUS OPERANDI OF SANP AND OTHER SOUTH AFRICAN INFOMERCIAL ADVERTISERS**

At the beginning of the previous chapter I outlined the stages that the production of TV Infomercials go through. I among others emphasised the considerable time lag between the conceptualisation of the Infomercial and its eventual transmission, as well as the fact that rehearsal forms an integral part of Infomercial production.

There are five significant differences between the production of the before-mentioned TV Infomercials and the SANP’s radio infomercials:

1. The spokespersons of SANP extensively use envisage-type mental preparation instead of repeated rehearsals, prior to the direct transmission of each SANP infomercial;
2. SANP Infomercials follow one of three basic formats—(a) provision of product information followed by real-time phone-in question and testimonial sessions, (b) provision of product information with reported testimonials that have been received in the mail or by e-mail, and (c) provision of general information about healthful living under the SANP banner, but without the mention of specific SANP products. The content of each of these Infomercials is new from week to week, by contrast with other South African Infomercials that are pre-recorded and re-transmitted, sometimes for years without being updated by editing, or without being replaced by a more up-to-date Infomercial of the company's products;
3. SANP does not use outside spokespersons from the ranks ex-SABC professional newsreaders and actors like the other South African Infomercial advertisers, but uses its own staff at the level of director, who know its products and who believe in their efficacy;
4. The content of each Infomercial is partially determined by the questions and testimonials of the members of public who phone in with queries and comments about the products during the live transmission, or who had written in to the SANP;
5. The actual production time of each SANP serial Infomercial takes no more than the actual transmission time of the infomercial, by contrast with the other South African Infomercials that are produced over a period of weeks.

It is safe to predict that soon other enterprising South African Infomercial advertisers will follow suite.

## THE FORMS OF COMMUNICATION USED BY SANP EMPLOYEES TO SUSTAIN THE COMPANY AND TO PROMOTE ITS PRODUCTS

In this section I will briefly outline the forms of communication that are distinguished within Communication Science, after which I will analyse a number of forms of *strategic communication* that SANP employees use to promote its products and to sustain the company. According to Klopper 2002 strategic communication in organisations entails that employees use the appropriate blend of forms of communication to establish an organisation or to maintain its growth. The following forms of communication could form part of strategic communication in an organisation:

- Intra-personal communication: Anticipating, envisaging, planning.
- Spoken communication in small groups: Brainstorming, conducting training sessions, casual conversation, consulting a superior, giving instructions, seeking clarification.
- Written and visual communication: compiling lists, completing forms, corresponding with persons outside of the organisation, designing company forms, issuing invitations, outlining projects, preparing diagrams, flowcharts & graphical representations, writing copy for advertisements, brochures, etc, and. writing training manuals.
- Public communication: Addressing a group impromptu, delivering a prepared speech, demonstrating a process or a product in public, giving a report-back to staff members.
- Organisational communication: authoring / assessing contracts and agreements, compiling spreadsheets, compiling company records, filling in reports, issuing staff notices and participating in group discussions.
- Mass communication: Authoring written information in the form of brochures, booklets, annual reports, etc. and participating in radio/ TV recordings.

- Electronic communication: Using computers for instruction, accessing the Internet for e-mail and using web browsers like Internet Explorer or Netscape to access websites online in order to find information or to purchase products.

As part of the case study that I conducted of SANP I looked at the forms of strategic communication that they employ. Although I have data for the full range of forms of communication used by the managers of SANP, I will limit my analysis to the following four forms of communication in my thesis:

- Intrapersonal communication;
- Spoken communication in small groups;
- Organisational communication' and
- Mass communication.

First, however, I will outline the demographic and organisational characteristics of SANP.

### **Demographic and organisational characteristics of the respondents**

Thirteen female and male SANP employees, from the ranks of Chairperson to Managers completed the questionnaire given under Addendum A of my thesis, reporting what forms of communication they used in the course of their duties. Four of them resided in KwaZulu-Natal, six in Gauteng and three in the Western Cape, requiring some form of regular distance communication (post, e-mail or telephone) between at least some of them.

Six of the thirteen respondents indicated that they were in the SANP Pharma division, four indicated that they were in the SANP Distribution division, two that they held positions in the SANP Pharma as well as the SANP Distribution division, and one respondent did not indicate to which division s/he belonged.

One each of the respondents were at the rank of general and divisional CEO, two at the rank of chairperson, five at the rank of director, two at the level of regional sales man-

ager, and two at the level of area sales manager. Six of the respondents were females and seven males.

## The specific forms of communication used by the respondents

According to Klopper 2002 three constituents of intrapersonal communication—anticipating, envisaging and planning—together form the basis of strategic thinking, a conceptual skill needed to effectively manage any organisation. According to Klopper anticipating and envisaging usually are individualistic, brief, proactive mind states that serve as precursors to planning, which he sees as a systematic, structured longitudinal process that requires data as well as effective time management as input.

A manager that can anticipate in order to execute her/ his job is a manager that has been empowered to first make decisions and thereafter reports them to top management. In this section I will analyse to what extent SANP managers need to use strategic thinking skills in their work. Figure 38 below summarises the frequency at which SANP managers use particular forms of intrapersonal communication:

Forms of intrapersonal communication	Frequency Of use	Managerial Ranks at SANP					
		Chairperson	General CEO	Divisional CEO	Director	Regional sales manager	Area sales manager
5. Anticipating <sup>9</sup>	Constantly	1	1	1	5	1	1
	Occasionally	1				1	1
	Never						
6. Envisaging	Constantly			1	3	1	1
	Occasionally	1	1		2	1	1
	Never						
7. Planning	Constantly	1	1	1	4	1	2
	Occasionally	1			1	1	
	Never						

Figure 38: Forms of intrapersonal communication employed by managers at SANP

## Anticipating

According to Klopper 2002 good anticipators are able to anticipate fortuitous as well as unfortunate events as part of effective planning. If a manager does not anticipate excellent product sales, so that a company does not have enough stock to sell, it is almost as bad

<sup>9</sup> The number in front of each form of communication relates to the number of it on the questionnaire.

as if s/he did not anticipate negative events that cause a drop in sales and causes the company to have capital tied up in excess stock

Against this background the SANP managers were asked at what frequency they needed to use the conceptual skill, anticipating, in their work. A low reportage of this skill usually implies management-by-the-book, a style that requires that officers at the lower ranks have to refer problems to those in higher ranks for decision-making before action could be taken to resolve problems that have cropped up.

Of the thirteen managers ten reported that they constantly had to anticipate eventualities in their work, an indication that officers at the lower ranks were empowered to directly make decisions about problems that they encounter and report their decisions afterwards. A further three respondents indicated that they occasionally had to anticipate eventualities, which further emphasises that SANP managers were not hamstrung by autocratic decision making protocols.

When correlated with the ranks of the respondents it is clear that power of decision-making has been devolved to the level of Director, because of the ten respondents that reported that they constantly had to anticipate, five were at the level of director. A further two of them at the even lower ranks of regional sales manager and area sales manager reported that they regularly had to anticipate eventualities.

## ***Envisaging***

According to Klopper 2002 envisaging is an optimistic, imaginative mind state that requires that a person conceptualise a yet nonexistent entity as if it were an existing entity within a future scenario as possible input for future planning. Klopper says that envisaging enables a planner to conflate concepts to form "mind objects," objects that still only exist in the mind of the planner. Klopper says that mind objects essentially are multi-modal mental models that an envisager constructs so that s/he can explore them by means of mind-internal senses, the mind's eye, the mind's ear, the mind's nose, the mind's taste buds and the mind's sense of touch. In this way a composer can hear a composition before it exists, a sculptor can see and feel the cool, smooth surface of a sculpture before it is sculptured and a chef can smell and taste the aromas and flavours of a new culinary delight before it is created.



The fact that of the thirteen SANP managers that were surveyed six indicated that they constantly needed to envisage future scenarios, and that a further six indicated that they occasionally needed to envisage, indicates that planning is every manager's business at SANP.

## **Planning**

Klopper 2002 says that by contrast with anticipating and envisaging, which are brief individualistic mind states, planning usually is a coordinated, systematic, collaborative process after which an envisaged object could become an actual new product for sale, or an improved existing product. Ten of the thirteen managers at SANP indicated that they constantly had to use planning as a management strategy, with the other three reporting that they occasionally had to use planning as a strategy.

The above-mentioned results clearly indicate that managers at all levels regularly employed intrapersonal communication strategies on a regular basis, a certain indication of the so-called flat management hierarchy that promotes teamwork, a sense of co-ownership and loyalty to a company.

## **Spoken communication in small groups**

According to Klopper 2002 spoken communication in small groups includes brainstorming, conducting training sessions, casual conversation, consulting a superior, giving instructions, and seeking clarification.

Klopper says that the principle of *locus of control* determines rank relationships during communication events. According to this principle the person with higher status in an organisation generally controls the flow of information during communication events. While anticipating, envisaging, planning, brainstorming and during conversation control is vested in each individual communicator. When one gives advice control is vested in the speaker, but when one seeks advice control is vested in the listener. During cross-examination control is vested in the person asking the questions, not in the person giving the answers.

Klopper distinguishes the following rank relationships during spoken small group communication:

During brainstorming the ranks of all participants are temporarily equalised, all participants have equal opportunities to contribute ideas, or to reformulate the ideas of other participants. Participants contribute ideas by turn taking, and no rank pulling is allowed;

During the conducting of training sessions (a pre-planned activity that involves the suspension of every-day duties for several hours to a day at a time), instruction giving, consulting a superior and seeking instructions (momentary activities, as the need arises), both the instructor and the instructee/s implicitly recognise that the instructor has a higher rank than the instructee/s. During instruction sessions communication is asymmetrical because the instructor controls the flow of information, does most of the overt communication, while instructee/s give covert feedback by means of facial expressions, gestures, body stance and occasional verbal queries. As shown in Figure 39 below the thirteen managers at SANP reported using the following forms of direct communication in small groups:

Spoken communication in small groups	Frequency Of use	Managerial Ranks at SANP					
		Chairperson	General CEO	Divisional CEO	Director	Regional sales manager	Area sales manager
8. Brainstorming	Constantly				1	1	1
	Occasionally	1	1	1	4	1	1
	Never	1					
9. Training others	Constantly						1
	Occasionally		1	1	4	2	1
	Never	2			1		
10. Conversation	Constantly	1		1	4		2
	Occasionally	1			1	2	
	Never		1				
11. Consulting a superior	Constantly				3		1
	Occasionally	1		1	2	2	1
	Never	1	1				
12. Giving instructions	Constantly	1			4	2	1
	Occasionally	1		1	1		1
	Never		1				
13. Seeking clarification	Constantly			1	2		
	Occasionally	2	1		3	2	2
	Never						

Figure 39: Forms of interpersonal communication employed by managers at SANP

## Brainstorming

According to Klopper 2002 brainstorming is a form of cooperative small group communication that forms the interface between intrapersonal communication and interpersonal communication. Brainstorming takes anticipating and critical assessment as input

to solve problems, and anticipating, critical assessment, envisaging and planning as input to conceptualise, design, model and produce new products or to improve existing ones.

Most of the managers—nine out of thirteen— reported occasionally using brainstorming. One middle level manager (Director) and two lower level managers (respectively a regional and an area sales manager) reported constantly using brainstorming during strategic planning sessions. Only the chairperson reported never using brainstorming.

According to Klopper 2002 brainstorming forms the crucial link between forms of intrapersonal communication (such as anticipating, envisaging and planning) and interpersonal communication. The fact that brainstorming also predominates in the middle and lower managerial levels (with nine out of the thirteen respondents being at the level of director or below) confirms that decision making has been devolved to the middle and lower managerial ranks at SANP.

***Training, Conversation, consultation and instructing and clarification***

A cursory inspection of the table under Figure 40 above shows that all other forms of interpersonal communication, given in the heading predominate in the middle and lower managerial ranks. A further indication that directors, as middle level managers, are mandated to make independent decisions, is that fewer of them (3) report constantly having to consult with superiors than constantly having to give instructions (4).

**Electronic communication**

Electronic communication came into its own as promotional medium in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by means of e-mail correspondence between individuals, e-mail advertising (commonly known as Spam, in reference to cheap, fatty tinned meat sold under the Spam label in the USA), and by means of the advertising and direct selling of products on websites on the Internet, known as online transactions. In online transactions customers place an electronic order for a product and supply credit card payment details in encrypted format. After the online seller has received electronic payment the product is shipped (posted) to the client's postal address. SANP's utilisation of the electronic communication medium, as shown in the table in Figure 40 below, shows that middle level managers (the directors) are the ones that are the most active users of this medium:

Electronic communication	Frequency Of use	Managerial Ranks at SANP					
		Chairperson	General CEO	Divisional CEO	Director	Regional sales manager	Area sales manager
35. Using computers for instruction	Constantly			1	3		1
	Occasionally				2	1	
	Never	2	1			1	1
36. Accessing the Internet for e-mail	Constantly			1			
	Occasionally	1			5	1	
	Never	1	1			1	2
37. Web browsing	Constantly				3		
	Occasionally			1	2		
	Never	2	1			2	2

Figure 40: Forms of electronic communication employed by managers at SANP

### ***The instructional use of computers, e-mail and web browsing***

Three out of the five directors report constantly using computers for instructional purposes, with the other two reporting that they occasionally do so. All five directors report that they occasionally use e-mail. Three out of the five directors report constantly engaging in web browsing, with the other two reporting that they occasionally do so. By contrast the two top level managers, the two chairpersons report only occasionally or never using the electronic communication media. The lower level managers (respectively the regional and area sales managers) also report a lower overall utilisation of electronic communication.

## **Mass communication**

### ***Acting as SANP spokesperson on radio and TV***

In Figure 41 below I give information for SANP spokespersonship in the mass electronic media:

Electronic communication	Frequency Of use	Managerial Ranks at SANP					
		Chairperson	General CEO	Divisional CEO	Director	Regional sales manager	Area sales manager
35. Using computers for instruction	Constantly				1		
	Occasionally			1			
	Never	2	1		4	2	2

Figure 41: SANP spokespersons in the mass electronic media

Two SANP managers are the spokespersons for the company, as presenters in SANP's radio and TV infomercials. They are namely Estie Schreiber, one of the Directors, and Irma Schutte, the Divisional CEO. As I indicated in a previous section, their mass communication activities relate to their innovative serial Infomercials over the radio and TV. The radio and TV Infomercial presentations of Estie Schreiber in particular have created close associations between SANP and **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**.

## The SANP website

SANP's website at <http://www.sanaturalproducts.co.za> opens with a splash page, a company homepage that intends to only create an essential image for the company by displaying the company logo and live link tabs to other pages without giving any written information. It is shown in Figure 42 below:

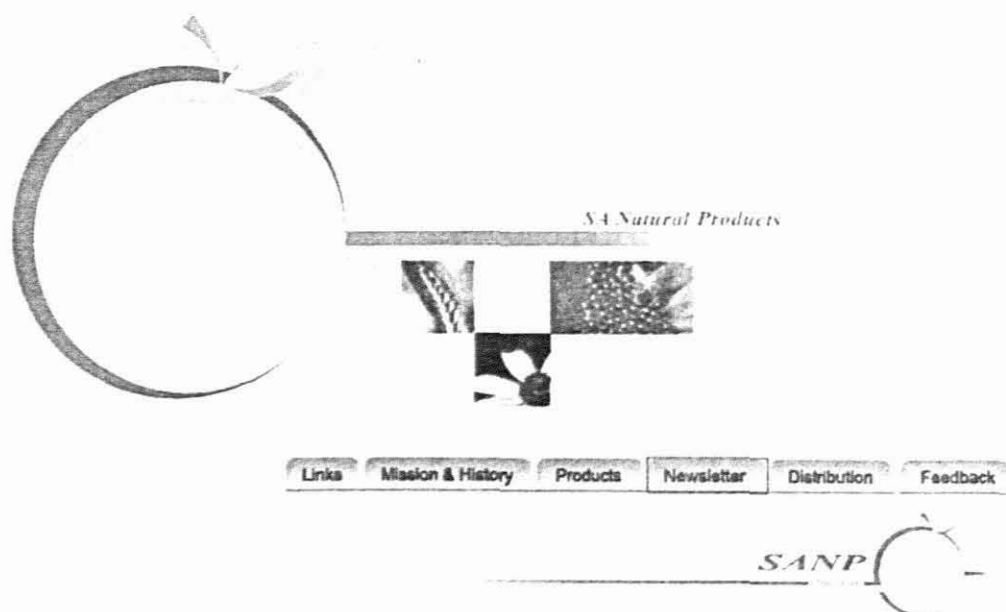


Figure 42: The splash page of the SANP website

The splash page opens with orange, yellow green and grey paper cutout citrus fruit motifs offset against a substantial white background. The big citrus fruit motif at the top of the page is repeated in smaller format on the bottom right hand side of the page. Overall the page gives the impression of spaciousness in contrast for instance the Verimark splash page (at <http://www.verimark.co.za>) on which a crowded pastiche product images vie for the viewer's attention.

The citrus fruit image at the top left side of the page is an electronically simulated paper cutout image that symbolises health and well-being. It is a thinly curving incomplete circle that is widest in the leftmost vertical plane, progressively tapering upwards and downwards until it ends sharply on both sides in the rightmost vertical plane, leaving a white gap between the two ends. The citrus fruit image is complemented by a paper cutout green stem and leaf image at the very top of the image. The citrus fruit image serves as logo for SANP. The fruit image casts a grey object-disconnected shadow<sup>10</sup> against a white background, giving the illusion that the cutout image is suspended in the air above the image. The cutout nature of the image and its disconnected shadow plays a significant role in presenting the logo as a symbolic aesthetic object that schematically represents SANP. While a photograph or realistic painting of a fruit<sup>11</sup> would have directly referred to that type of fruit as an icon, without invoking any further meaning, the aesthetically rendered cutout image of the fruit acts as a general symbolic representation<sup>12</sup> of healthy natural living. Aesthetic objects that de-emphasise their iconic reference potential—becoming non-representational images—enhance their symbolic reference potential. Such symbolic images are said to achieve an estrangement effect on the interpreter, prompting her/him to look for a deeper symbolic meaning of the image.

A horizontal orange line stretches rightwards from the virtual fruit, underlining the name *SA Natural Products* in lettering that seems too small for the after underscoring the name *Natural Products*.

Immediately below the grey shadow of the horizontal line are three quizzical images (two square images and one rectangular image) that prompt the viewer to further interpretation. All three images are rendered in shades of orange and red, suggesting that they could be partial images of the same object at three different levels of magnification ranging from the microscopic to the macroscopic. The middle image is displaced downward by its own height in relation to the other two images that are in line with one another.

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<sup>10</sup> See Zettl 1999: 17-45 for the aesthetic roles of lighting and shadow in images.

<sup>11</sup> See the image of an orange in Figure 16 in chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup> Deacon 1997:69-101 discusses the progression of conventional (man-made) images from *iconic* through *indexical* to *symbolic* reference relationships. Firstly, according to Deacon iconic images directly refer the interpreter to items in the environment. Secondly, indexical images refer to a whole class of items that share similar attributes. They form an intermediate reference stage because they equally refer to items in the environment and to related concepts that refer to one another as members of the same class. Finally, SYMBOLS are images that directly refer to other symbols on the semiotic web of meanings encoded in the minds of interpreters, while only indirectly referring to items in the environment.

The leftmost image is enigmatic in that it shows an unidentifiable diagonal double ridge both sides of a sequence of seedlike structures. It gives the impression of being the image of a microscopic natural structure that has been magnified several times. The downwardly displaced image shows some petals of a yellow flower against a dark background. The petals surround a black inner seed core. The rightmost rectangular image, twice the width of the other two, shows the magnified seed core of the yellow flower, with the inner edges of some petals just visible on the right hand side of the image. Towards the upper right hand side of the image there is discernable a wispy image that could be a minute cobweb, or the gossamer wings of a minute moth-like insect. The spatial positioning of the three images also contributes to the estrangement effect of the page, prompting the viewer to further interpretation. Taken together the repeated citrus paper cutout images and the facets of the flower at different levels of magnification form a subtle visual message implying an invitation: "Look more closely, there is more to us than meets the eye."

Below the three images there are six virtual tabs, displaying the names *Links*, *Mission & History*, *Products*, *Newsletter*, *Distribution* and *Feedback*. The *Links* tab takes one to links that take one to other servers on the Internet that provide additional information about the products that SANP imports and distributes. The *Mission & History* tab takes one to a page that outlines the origin of the company and the values and beliefs that guides its business practices. The *Newsletter* tab leads to an empty page, containing a notice that there is no news to report. The *Distribution* tab leads to a page that lists SANP's distribution outlets. The *Feedback* tab leads to the page shown on the next page. The product page presents a pointer-sensitive menu that displays a packaged product in the middle of the screen as soon as one moves the mouse pointer over the logo-stylised product name that have been rendered as residing in hollow areas on the page. Each product link forms a display link to its image that appears at the centre when the pointer is moved over it, as well as a live link to a subsequent information page if the product name is clicked as shown in Figure 43 below.



Figure 43: The products page on the SANP website

One aspect of the SANP website that puts it apart from other websites of Infomercial companies is that no direct selling takes place at this website. Because SANP is an importer and wholesaler its natural health products are only sold in pharmacies, health food shops, Clicks and Discom. Therefore the website carries a notice that SANP's products can be bought at these outlets. For ethical reasons SANP has made a decision not to compete with companies that sell its products.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I characterised SANP as essentially a family concern and analysed the forms of communication that it employs to promote its products. I in particular looked at the information networks within information networks that SANP employs to promote its premier product **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**. I showed that while this product is mainly promoted through the innovative serial radio and TV Infomercials presented by Estie Schreiber and Irma Schutte, SANP engaged a range of additional forms of promotion, like being an official supplier at the annual Comrades marathon, and sponsoring the transmission of regular information updates about the marathon on the SABC 1 TV channel, and the radio channels East Coast Radio and Ukhozi FM, and by addressing athletes during



special country-wide sports clinics. These additional promotional activities all form part of the networks within networks to promote and sustain the sales of **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**.

I also showed that while biomedical research reports specific anti-allergic, anti-carcinogenic effects of Spirulina during controlled animal laboratory trials, the website maintained by the producer, Marcus Rohrer, as well as SANP's website, considerably understate the specific beneficial effects of Spirulina by emphasising general lifestyle enhancing benefits such as its energy-giving, resistance-boosting, stamina-increasing and recuperative effects.

I discussed a number of characteristics that set SANP apart from other companies that advertise their products by means of infomercials, namely its strong sense of business ethics, the serial radio and TV Infomercials that it is busy pioneering with its own people, rather than hired media professionals as authoritative spokespersons

Finally, I analysed the different forms of communication that SANP managers employ to create and sustain a public profile for its product range. By means of this analysis I showed that the forms of communication used by its managers indicate that SANP is company with a flat hierarchic structure that has devolved real powers of decision making to middle level and lower level managers. Finally, I assessed the efficacy of SANP's homepage, explaining why images do not promote products per se, but rather serve as symbolic references to natural healthful living. In the next chapter I will give a general summary of the results of my study.

In the next chapter I present my conclusions about South African infomercials.

## CONCLUSION

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will summarise my conclusions about the state of the South African Infomercial industry. I would like to emphasise, as I did in the first chapter, that because this is the first time that South African Infomercials are being described, I am making a constructive rather than a critical analysis of them. My thesis therefore has to be seen as a first exploration of the South African Infomercial landscape rather than a comparative, critical analysis of which Infomercials are better than others. Having said this, I would also like to point out that I profiled the Infomercials of SA Natural Products (SANP) for special attention in chapter 7 because of their innovative and pioneering nature.

### THE FOCUS OF MY RESEARCH

In the second chapter I indicated that I would focus on three aspects of Infomercials in my thesis, namely (a) to describe the principles, codes and structures that underlie infomercials, (b) to characterise South African infomercials, and (c) to analyse in detail the hierarchy of information networks, and the central role of Infomercials within such a network, that sustain a particular product. In this chapter I will give an account of the extent to which I managed to meet these three objectives.

### INFOMERCIALS AS FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

In chapter 4 I showed that Infomercials essentially are persuasive messages that advertisers direct to potential customers via the electronic mass medium, TV. I also showed that SANP is set apart from other Infomercial advertisers in that they have pioneered a new type of infomercial, the serial infomercial, for radio as well as for TV. SANP is furthermore different because it uses knowledgeable company staff at directorial level to promote its products, not high profile professional spokespersons like actors and ex-presenters.

In chapter 5 I analysed the visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile codes that advertisers use to promote their products, emphasising the predominance of visual and auditory codes in radio and TV infomercials. I also showed that because of their persuasive charac-

ter Infomercials contain covert information, hidden in entertaining narratives. In the first part of chapter 6 I showed that Infomercials are the visible or audible messages within a more comprehensive network of messages that Infomercial advertisers have to construct and sustain in order for their Infomercials to work.

## **SOUTH AFRICAN INFOMERCIALS**

In the later parts of chapter 6 I outlined the Betakit Global Study System and the Prosper Program TV infomercials, products that are said to contain pure harmonic sounds within everyday human activity sounds that would assist the listener to relax, awake from a refreshed sleep and study with concentration and enhance memory capacity.

I showed that Glomail Pty. Ltd uses TV infomercials, supplemented by over 50 fully owned Glomail shops, over 20 franchised Glomail shops and Glomail sections in over 300 chain stores countrywide, as well as a website to promote a wide range of utility houseware and self-betterment products.

I also analysed a typical TV Infomercial used by HomeMark Pty Ltd to promote a range of self-improvement products and houseware very similar to that of Glomail Pty Ltd.

Thereafter I analysed two TV Infomercials of the short term insurance company Outsurance Pty Ltd, supplemented by short TV advertisements, print media advertisements and an innovative website.

I analysed one of Verimark Pty Ltd's kitchen utensil Infomercials and showed that the company uses Verimark Shops in malls, Verimark barrel outlets, dedicated sections in chain stores like Pick & Pay and Makro, as well as a website to promote a range of products very similar to those of Glomail and HomeMark.

## **SANP AS AN INFOMERCIAL ADVERTISER**

While the South African Infomercial industry in general produces sophisticated Infomercials SANP follows a subtle persuasive approach to promote their products in these two electronic media. Estie Schreiber constantly promotes specific SANP products on East Coast Radio, Lotus FM, Good Hope FM, and Radio Sonder Grense. Under the sponsorship of SANP Irma Schutte, as a homeopath, occasionally promotes general aspects of healthful living and well-being. Because Irma Schutte's presentations present the image of SANP as

a company that does not exclusively promote their products, but that also promotes a natural living. This gives a high level of credibility to SANP when it does promote its products over the radio and on TV.

The spokespersons for Infomercial advertisers almost without exception are mass media trained professionals with prominent public profiles (actors and (ex) TV presenters) who play scripted, rehearsed roles in pre-recorded Infomercials that are subsequently repeatedly transmitted on TV. SANP's Infomercials are different in several significant respects. Estie Schreiber and Irma Schutte have namely pioneered the use of short serial Infomercials that are transmitted only once over particular radio stations, mostly during live phone-in broadcasts. Also their Afrikaans serial TV Infomercials that are broadcast over *kykNET* are short segments that each deals with a particular aspect of the product, or the aspect of healthful living that is being promoted. Where the Infomercial presenters of other companies come over as professionals that have rehearsed their roles, Estie Schreiber and Irma Schutte come across as persons with expert knowledge in the subjects that they are presenting, allowing them to spontaneously present information without prior rehearsal. When I asked them about the nature of their preparation for the transmissions both indicated that they used the forms of intrapersonal communication envisaging, anticipating and planning to mentally rehearse for their recording sessions, not physical rehearsals on set or in studio-like settings.

## POSTSCRIPT: AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS

On 13 March 2002 Mario Oldani, the overseas non-voting board member of SANP tendered his resignation as Director of SANP. On 27 September, Jasper Schutte (CEO, Human Resources of SANP Pharma), and Thea Schutte, his wife resigned, with two days notice, as employees of SANP. On 28 September Mario Oldani, in his capacity as Director of Spirulina International, served notice on SANP, terminating their exclusive resell agreement of **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer**® in South Africa. It has since become known that Oldani, and Jasper and Thea Schutte are in the process of launching a new company in South Africa to sell Spirulina. The Goldswain Advertising Agency, which had lost its bid against *Sonnenburg Murphy Leo Burnett* to help plan and design SANP's product promotions, will act as agency of the new company.

Immediately after Oldani's notice the airwaves fell silent about **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®**. The resignations of Jasper and Thea Schutte amounted to a split in the Schutte family. Two members of the Schutte family had covertly planned with Oldani, the overseas shareholder, to remove **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** from the company whose extraordinary advertising campaign had made the product the highest profile natural health food supplement in South Africa.

This turn of events has effectively left SANP without the product whose image they established and nurtured over the past three years by means of Estie Schreiber's persuasive radio and TV serial infomercials, backed up by Marie Pelser's efficient distribution network that has kept pharmacies, health food shops and other retailers stocked with SANP's products.

SANP having lost the **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** resell contract in South Africa has brought to a close one of the most remarkable promotional campaigns in the local Infomercial industry history. In the process SANP has pioneered a new Infomercial format, namely the serial infomercial, they have shown that companies can achieve extraordinary flexibility in management by devolving decision making powers to middle level management. Such a devolution is however an act of trust on the side of top managers. Ultimately the conclusion of the Spirulina saga has shown that partnership is built on trust, and that inside trust there always lurks the potential for betrayal.

SANP faces the dilemma that they own the image of a product that they cannot promote anymore. The new company will find that they have a product that is associated with the high ethical standards that SANP has become known for, and whose phenomenal sales were due to **Spirulina by Marcus Rohrer®** being associated with the intuitive, optimistic persona of Estie Schreiber. Whether the new company will ever be able to find such an articulate and persuasive spokesperson only time will tell.

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