

Ford Motor Company celebrates 100 years in SA

Brands which stand the test of time - and by that, I mean the ones which are still around, and still making money after decades and in some cases, more than a century - generally do two things really well. They produce a good product or products - and they don't stint on marketing expenditure.

 By [Brendan Seery](#) 8 Nov 2023



That bears out the old marketing adage that you can build the world's best mousetrap but, without promoting it, then the road to the World's Best Mousetrap factory will grow thick with weeds.

Major player

Ford Motor Company began more than 100 years ago by revolutionising automobile manufacturing with Henry Ford's version of the production line and has gone on to become one of the most recognised global brands. Its logo has changed little, in essence, in more than a century.

South Africa was one of the first countries outside the USA to see the erection of a Ford manufacturing and assembly plant helping establish the brand as a perennial South African favourite. I was surprised, though, to hear that this month marks 1

global giant's centenary in business in this country.

To mark the occasion, Ford is running a series of events, underpinned by an advertising, marketing and PR campaign which, it hopes, will truly do justice to both the brand and its history in South Africa.



And, it's off to a good start. Neale Hill, President of Ford Motor Company – Africa hosts a video which is a compressed history of Ford in South Africa. Standing in front of a group of Rangers (the company's best-selling product) in a rural setting, Hill highlights some of the cars from Ford's past which still get enthusiast hearts thumping. He comes across as an ordinary oke, someone you could chat to at the braai...typical South African, in other words. It emphasises the symbiosis between Ford and this country.

The video also shows just how much of a major player the company has become in the SA economy, with billions in investment over the years – to the extent that its plants now produce vehicles and engines for a number of global markets.

Good storytelling

It's a message which should resonate with current and potential Ford owners. It speaks to the emotional relationship which more than 85% of South Africans have with their cars. It says: We were part of your history and we're going to be around to be part of your future.

It's simple but highly effective brand messaging. And, most importantly it underpins the thorough marketing of the parent group and the local offshoot. Head of marketing and communications Doreen Mashinini, for example, has been in the vehicle business for more than 20 years and she and her team have cleverly managed to expand the Ranger appeal from its commercial and agricultural base to include a more lifestyle and fashion-inclined demographic.



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Ford's marketing is integrated with slick and effective PR – headed in-house by former journo Minesh Bhagaloo and with Meropa Communications as a partner – who understand that good marketing is, first and foremost, about good storytelling and about understanding the media. It's a nod to the reality that well-executed PR is a "force multiplier" and makes your marketing Rand go further.

The proof of Ford's marketing success is obvious: Ranger has risen in sales dramatically over the past decade and the company's exports are flying. Interestingly, Hill had to pitch against other global Ford operations to win the nod from the U

Ford HQ to get additional investment for SA... an indication that, to steal Toyota's old slogan, everything seems to keep going right for Ford's team locally.

As an overall marketing and communications success story, Ford SA can offer many "best practice" lessons in how to sell and how to advertise – not only locally, but also worldwide.

For all that, Ford SA gets this week's Orchid. And it won't be the last.

Place for airheads

By contrast, you have to wonder about the silliness in a recent Game Stores ad which, a colleague reminded me, doesn't seem to make any real marketing point or try to sell anything specifically. If anything, it does the opposite, by portraying Game as a place for airheads.

Flighted mainly during Heritage Month, the ad was premised on the "uniquely South African" theme and sought to include supposedly iconic references to this country.



Really? A loud-mouthed dictator type dressed in a pink "camouflage" uniform, riding in a pink BMW cabriolet? Sundry people in khaki with brown berets (but in case you think right-wing, also including black people). Kids in school uniform...

The only bit I recognised as uniquely South African was the two white aunties who had their 15 minutes of fame through their roadside protests against Jacob Zuma...

Where, though, is the marketing call-to-action? I'd be afraid of being seen buying anything in Game for fear of being mistaken for one of their village idiots.

Therefore, an Onion for trying to force marketing humour where there isn't any. If you need tips on that, give Nando's or Chicken Licken a shout...

ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

Brendan Seery has been in the news business for most of his life, covering coups, wars, famines - and some funny stories - across Africa. Brendan Seery's *Orchids and Onions* column ran each week in the *Saturday Star* in Johannesburg and the *Weekend Argus* in Cape Town. View my profile and articles...