

Betting their soles on boots

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Recognition: Selling unsexy products with flair is an art; Onions on way for PR people who ignore golden rule: Know the media platform you are targeting...

Enough water has flowed under the bridge by now that I'm sure Brett Morris, now chief executive of FCB South Africa, won't mind me recounting an anecdote about the TV ad they did about 15 years ago for the Toyota Camry.

"Brett," I told him, "anyone who can make a Camry look sexy is an advertising genius!"



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Brett Morris 6 Jan 2021



The Camry came from Australia and was, to be kind, rather plain. Morris and the FCB team tarted one up with classy alloy wheels, a boot spoiler and shot the commercial outside a sandstone brick school building in Joburg in the early morning light, making the best of the Camry's gleaming metallic silver paintwork.

It all looked rather fetching and cast the car in an entirely different light from the beige one you might see on the showroom floor.

That ad was a challenge and I was being serious: rising to the challenge of making the bland and everyday appealing in such a way that it sells takes talent. Sadly, too, the work of ad agencies with run-of-the-mill, "everyday" products is often overlooked, come awards time.

There have been occasions when agencies have done work for free because they had a cool concept for an edgy brand.

I've perhaps been guilty of that in the past in the way I've handed out Orchids, being attracted by the bling, while the marketing communication for "unsexy" brands just didn't seem to catch my eye.

To make up for that – at least a little – I did pay extra attention to a campaign being done by Boomtown, an agency from Gqeberha (the Eastern Cape place formerly known as Port Elizabeth). The client, Maxeco, makes safety footwear and is part of the Lemaitre group.



Boomtown's new campaign for Maxeco celebrates 30 years - 10-million pairs - of iconic safety footwear

Boomtown 7 Apr 2021



I've never heard of them but they're big in their category, apparently. Number one, in fact.

This year, they're celebrating their 30th year in business and the 10 million pairs of boots they have produced for the construction, mining and farming sectors.

But, how on earth do you make safety footwear look cool?

Well, one of the things you do is rope in Ahmed Tilly, ad creative legend, to come up with a creative strategy. Working with Tilly, Boomtown's creative team came up with the "most beautiful shoe in the world" concept. That already makes you react: A work boot? No way!

But, the boots are beautiful because they get the job done – a job which has helped build, feed and clothe South Africa and definitely made some contribution to a better life for many.

It's also a salute to those men and women who keep our economy going – often in dirty, dangerous and tiring circumstances... but who seldom get acknowledged. Orchids to Maxeco and Boomtown.

In an average week, I probably get a dozen press releases a day – but only a quarter are worth following up. The reason? You're targeting the wrong person – I run a news operation and not a business, electronics or sports section.

Nor am I, dear misguided PR person in Cape Town, the journo to whom you should be directing your breathless "news" about the release of a new single by a singer I've never heard of. Bottom line: thousands of PR clients are paying a fortune for huge media wastage. Apart from the fact that PR people know my name, but have no clue about what I and my publication are interested in, the reality is that they also send out "shotgun" releases to all and sundry in the hope some sucker will pick it up.

“ PR golden rule: Know the media platform you are targeting – what they carry and how they do it – and know the

people you are dealing with. The best PR people tailor their pitches to me. ”

That means they have a much better chance of getting some coverage. The best of them can even craft a piece and pictures which stands by itself as an editorial contribution, albeit with a client in the background.

No Onions yet – but they will flow if some of you don't up your game.

You're taking money from clients under false pretences.

ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

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

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