

# An ode to 60 years

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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It was interesting that, after one of the longest, and most successful partnerships in South African marketing communication history, Toyota and ad agency FCB could not read from the same page when talking about their breakup.



After 60 years, Toyota South Africa unceremoniously gave FCB the boot last week, citing a “robust agency tender process” which, clearly, went against FCB and in favour of Publicis Groupe Africa.

FCB, though, had a completely different view.

In its official announcement, the agency attributed the move to a decision by Toyota “to end the successful 60-year relationship to align its account globally through Publicis, which also services Toyota in other markets, including North America and Australia.”

Who is telling the porkies here, I wonder?

It reminded me of the time I was told by the then MD of Net#work BBDO in 2006, that the agency had won the prize Mercedes-Benz account from its long-standing partner, Leo Burnett. What he neglected to say was that the work was shifted to BBDO as part of a global re-alignment. But that is another story entirely...

Toyota didn't become a global giant and top car maker in South Africa by being soft – although back in the days when it was a family-run business (by the Wessels family), the agency was an integral part of changing the perceptions of South African car buyers who were biased against “Jap crap”.

One of the things which have always been true about the work FCB has done for Toyota is that it has been uniquely South African. Who can forget comedian Tolla Van Der Merwe hauling a “Rambo” look-alike out of a swamp and taking him away in his tough Toyota Stallion bakkie? Or “Buddy” the boxer dog, whose image was used to promote the whole range of Toyotas.

And, I realised a few years ago, after giving Buddy an Onion for what I thought was a concept wearing thin, that the dog has fierce supporters. I got hate mail.

Over the years, FCB's work on Toyota has attracted more Orchids from me than any other brand. That's a tribute to the quality of the ads which, like the country and the company, have changed markedly over the years – not only in showcasing vehicle tech, but also in the complexions of the main actors.

But a large part in the successful promotion of the brand of FCB in the media – and far further than just this Orchids and Onions column – was the efforts of the agency's long-time partner, C Cubed Communications, whose Cathy Van Zyl and Petra Peacock were some of the most efficient PR people I've yet worked with.

A farewell Orchid to FCB. And another to Cathy and Petra. It's been a long, and successful, road.

Less successful – especially from my point of view, as a victim – was the silly attitude of Johannesburg refuse agency Pikitup, who plunged the biggest city in the country into chaos over the past week because they couldn't get their act together when contracting new logistics suppliers.

Their social media team knocked off on Friday afternoon, just as the storms of protest were building about rubbish let uncollected for days, right across the city. Not only that, but they praised themselves and the workers at various depots around the city.... Some of whom were probably causing trouble through some unspecified "internal labour relations issues".

No, people, a fish should never be praised for swimming.



#### Toyota and FCB end 60-year partnership

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And, in marketing – even to a captive audience like city householders – you still need to be available to communicate in a crisis.

It's a textbook example of "how not to do it" when you have a crisis. Is it too much of a pipedream to hope that one day, capable communicators and marketers will be appointed to our government, municipal and parastatal organisations?

OK. I guess not.

A rotten Onion to Pikitup (which stinks pretty much like my rubbish which has been sitting out on the street for five days already) for pathetic handling of a crisis.

*Got anything you'd like to say or got any great work I may not know about? Drop me a line at [brendanjseery@gmail.com](mailto:brendanjseery@gmail.com)*

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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