

# Tuned into what matters most

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA) and its ad agency, Ogilvy, has always been tapped into what makes South Africa tick - or at least that part of South Africa that is a potential market for vehicles.

Some of the most memorable commercials have been produced over the years for VW, ads that have a uniquely South African flavour. Lately, I note with some concern that VW, along with many other global brands, is importing the odd bit of marketing communication. While it may be true South Africa is part of the international community and that certain selling pitches are universal – regardless of language, race or gender – it is said that our special local voice becomes muted.

Not all is lost, though – far from it, as far as VWSA is concerned. That much is clear from the latest ad for its complete car range, rather than a single model.

Again produced by Ogilvy, the ad starts with that typical family holiday scenario for many South African families – hitting the road before dawn for the long journey to the sea. We see two VWs – a Touareg SUV and a Golf GTI – setting off separately, but passing and repassing each other through the day.

In the back, the kids in the different cars notice each other – on the highway, at the petrol station and at a lay-by. Finally, it turns out that the two families are heading to the same place as the Touareg and Golf park close to each other at a seaside resort. The kids get out and the burgeoning friendship, grown through the hours of “knowing” each other on the journey, seems to be cemented with a smile.

Then comes the punchline: It's not just a car. It isn't. It is a way of escape, a way of fulfilling dreams and, most of all, of making friendships. That has always been the VW message, that the brand is a family.

The latest ad just burnishes that image, so it gets an Orchid from me. Interesting, too, that the ad features black and white kids. Perhaps I should not notice that, but race is, obviously, a big issue in this country. When you watch the VW ad, you can't help but hope our kids get on better with each other than we do.



Pixabay

People sometimes regard me as a technophobe because I am always firing off the silver-bullet questions at digital vampires (the worst of them is “Why?” – “Because we can” is not an answer, people).

However, I can, and do, make use of the internet frequently, including to do shopping, which is, some might say, contradictory, given that I style myself as an “analogue man”. (That, by the way, doesn’t mean I wear hair shirts and communicate by smoke signals; it means I favour real, and not screen, interactions, with people and places.)

This week, I was considering upgrading my old Nikon camera. I did plenty of research online and, because I had subscribed to a regular newsletter from Foto Discount World in Pretoria, checked out their website for the camera, lens and tripod I wanted. The price was good and I was in two minds about driving to the shop (that old analogue approach) to check out the camera in person.

Sensibly, I phoned first. I was told the particular bundled item I wanted was out of stock. “I just need to check with Nikon to see if they have stock, which should be here in a day or two. But I will call you in 10 minutes...”

You know what’s coming, don’t you? Despite their having my cellphone number and my phone being switched on all the time, I have not heard a word. I gave him the best part of a day and then I went to Plan B. This was to go to the website of Orms Direct, a photography specialist shop in Cape Town. They had what I wanted and responded promptly to my e-mail asking if it was in stock. I ordered, paid by credit card and then later confirmed with the helpline staff that the parcel had been dispatched. I could also track the shipment by Fedex, their shipping company.

The lesson in this is that, if you run an e-commerce operation, make sure you do it wholeheartedly. If someone makes an enquiry, for goodness’ sake, phone them back. Foto Discount World, you lost my business. So you get a marketing Onion. Orms Direct you get an Orchid, not only for a slick and professional website, but because you have demonstrated clearly that, even in the digital space, the most effective form of marketing is good customer service.

I will be needing new lenses and accessories in due course.

Guess where I’m going?

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ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

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

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