

Toyota taps into SA's zeitgeist

By  [Brendan Seery](#)

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Resilience: Coping and hoping when floods leave KZN factory in knee-deep water; SobAlert and CarTrackZA display stupid, shameless marketing



It is the brand ad that nobody in a company ever wants to have to make: When you've been hit by a disaster and need to assure current and future customers that you will bounce back.

For some companies brought low by natural or human-made circumstances, this can even get ignored in the need to do figurative – and sometimes literal – fire-fighting.

However, if your plight has been splashed across national media, you need to act quickly to prevent a collapse of confidence in your brand. And that is exactly what Toyota South Africa has done with the commercial it put together as the company got back on its feet after the destruction wrought at its Durban factory by the recent devastating floods.

With the factory floor at Prospecton knee-deep in water – and hundreds of vehicles on the production line and in the holding areas inundated with water – Toyota suffered a financial body blow.

Even for the biggest car maker in Africa, this was a serious crisis. The Durban factory produces Corolla Cross and Quest, Hilux, Hiace Ses'fikile and Fortuner – while also assembling a variety of Hino commercial vehicles. So to have it offline for two months was bound to cause worry among customers, but also among dealers, parts suppliers and its staff.

So, the commercial had to put out a positive message. And Toyota SA's long-time advertising agency partner, FCB Joburg, decided the late Johnny Clegg's iconic *Brave Heart* was the perfect piece of quintessentially upbeat South African music with which to tell Toyota SA's story of coping – and hope.

South Africans, the story tells us, are resilient and we see the Toyota people getting stuck in with the “mopping up operation”, readying the production lines to return to producing “Mzansi's favourite cars”.

No actors, no fancy digital effects. Just the ordinary folk at Toyota – ordinary South Africans – getting up, dusting themselves off and getting back to business.



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It's a great way to remind people why your brand has become a household word in SA but is also a reminder that all of us – not just those who work for Toyota – are tough and we can overcome.

It won't be easy... but it can be done. Toyota also created an internal slogan for its recovery – Rebuilding Better Together. This talks to how employees work together as one team to find a way to renew and improve the facility.

Orchids to Toyota and FCB Joburg. Toyota up and running will be a piece of good news in a gloomy world.

Shameless marketing

You have to wonder about how brands handle the new digital universe which the marketing gurus tell them is the truth and the light as far as marketing is concerned. And how they direct their presence on social media.

A disturbing trend has been to involve “bots” – automatic programmes which respond in a specific way as soon as the brand name pops up on a social media platform. But, without proper strategy, or humans supervising how they work, they can make your brand look dumb.

A person I follow on Twitter vented his frustration at being phoned repeatedly by Car Track, offering him a tracker for his car – which he already has. Hardly had he tweeted though, than CarTrackZA's "bot" responded: "How can we assist?"

I thought that was incredibly stupid marketing, so I commented: "You are NOT serious"... and guess what? CarTrackZA came back to me and said: "Hi Brendan Seery. Let us know how we can assist today?"



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CarTrackZA, if you cannot afford to put sentient beings on your social media team, don't bother at all. For self-inflicted brand damage, you get an Onion... because if you can't get this right, how are you going to find my car?

But even that stupidity pales into insignificance compared to the appalling behaviour of SobAlert – a "natural" product which allegedly reduces hangovers and bad, drunken behaviour – which posted a plug for itself on a tweet by Good Things Guy Brent Lindeque, mourning the death of his nephew in a car crash.

SobAlert's tweet implied alcohol may have been involved in the crash. Lindeque was outraged, as were his legions of Twitter followers, who piled on, many promising to report SobAlert to Twitter.

I had a look at SobAlert's website, which raised many red flags.

It only has one product and claims the compound is "approved by medical aids". As far as I know medical aids do not approve "natural" remedies and require prescriptions, which means SobAlert is misleading people or lying.

Given the way they tried to profit shamelessly from someone's grief, I am inclined to believe the worst of them.

For disgusting marketing behaviour, SobAlert, you get a wholly natural, non-South African Health Products Regulatory Authority approved, Onion.

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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