

Ford's fabulous modern fable

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Morale booster: Ad shows the kind of SA we can become; Kudos to Netflix for important content and clever promotion.



The best of advertising and marketing often fulfils a dual role, intended or not, and can become an important piece of cultural history.

That is why the latest brand ad by Ford South Africa is so interesting – because it goes well beyond promoting the Blue Oval itself.

It is a modern fable, or story with a message – and this one is about how, if you look after a golden goose, then it will lay plenty of tasty golden eggs for you.

And that is a much broader lesson for those who would rid our country of the evils of capitalism and decry the importance of direct foreign investment.

Ford's global parent company has ploughed more than R15bn into its manufacturing facility at Silverton outside Pretoria and more than R600m into an engine plant at Struandale in the Eastern Cape.

They did this because the government came to the party and helped set up a Special Economic Zone north of the capital specifically to cater for motor manufacturers and component suppliers.

Still, it was a serious decision by the company's US headquarters to put down the money and the South African Ford team - led by the then Ford SA managing director Neale Hill (he is now head of the whole Ford operation for Africa) – had to sell their pitch.

That they got the nod from their bosses was despite the fact that, by many metrics, South Africa is not a great place to locate a car building plant. We are what is known in the economics business as an “end of hemisphere” supplier a long distance from many markets.

Yet Ford – as well as other carmakers like Toyota, Nissan, BMW, Isuzu and Mercedes Benz – believe we are more than viable as a production centre. Government incentives make the investments worthwhile.



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What Ford's new promotional spot shows is how such investments create jobs, not just for the people employed directly by the plants, but throughout the ecosystem right down to the spaza shop owners in the area.

Of course, Hill and his team had to convince Ford that we have the commitment and know-how to produce vehicles like the Ranger and Everest which are as good, or better than, any others produced across the Ford global network.

And that is also a reminder that our country is still a place of hope.

In that sense, Ford's commercial, while it presents a positive vision of the brand and its people and products, is also a morale booster because it shows the kind of SA we can become – a world leader.

An Orchid to Ford. One hopes you sent a copy through to Luthuli House.

The Netflix thought

I was intrigued to see the implosion of the share price of Netflix this week, following their decision to limit the number of

users on one login... which cost them a huge number of customers.

I think that is a pity because, whatever else you say about their operation, they have not only given TV viewers another option, but they have also used their financial clout to produce important content, including investigative documentaries.

In the current media space, where purses are tighter than the proverbial fish's bum, this is to be welcomed, because the media is still society's watchdog.

Netflix put a huge effort into promoting its eye-opening documentary, *Who killed Senzo*, about the murder of football star Senzo Meyiwa.

And the clever part of the promotions was in the timing – Netflix did a number of online 'site takeovers' on the days before and after the premiere of the docc, which also happened to coincide with the arraignment of some of those accused of the murder.

On *The Citizen* online site, for example, the ads were tracked for reaction and achieved record numbers of clicks.

The exercise showed that clever media placements (like site takeovers) can be a highly effective tool.

So, Orchids to Netflix. I certainly hope you continue to produce more original and varied content, both here and abroad.

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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