

# The thing about brand consciousness

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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I do sometimes wonder whether we might be doing altogether too much navel-gazing when it comes to assessing whether brands are "conscious" or not.



Is it the purpose of a brand to be conscious? It never used to be. Brands (and the companies which own them) have a purpose in the sense that they are there to make money.

Is that still enough, though, in a modern world where people are only too aware of the threats to our planet and its people? Increasingly, the marketing experts are telling us that people want "their" brands to be conscious – in the sense that they need to be aware of how they conduct themselves; how they produce, market and distribute their products and how each one of those phases impacts on the environment and on people.

This, of course, is the new "corporate social responsibility", perhaps because that phrase has become over-used and cliched and, in some outrageous cases, has seen companies trying to "greenwash" their brands by spending more on telling people how good they are than on actually reducing harm to the world and people.

That is not an accusation you can level at Ford SA's Ford Wildlife Foundation (FWF), which has been going for more than 25 years and currently supports much important wildlife and environmental projects around southern Africa.

The newest ad for FWF – if you can even call it that – showcases some of the work being done by these important NGOs. Although there are a few shots of Ford Ranger bakkies (which is the most common form of support), the carmaker fits in as a facilitator, because it is the projects themselves which should be the focus of attention.

The FWF's work doesn't get much attention, yet it is one of the most important campaigns supporting conservation in this country. That alone indicates to me that Ford is in it for the long haul and not for the kudos. That long-term commitment speaks to the authenticity of the program - this is about making a genuine difference to the community and not to the company's bottom line.

It doesn't harm the brand, of course, that many of the buyers of its top-selling Ranger bakkies and Everest SUVs are the sort to get out of the city and into the wild and are often aware of the challenges facing our environment. The FWF publicity, muted as it is, also fits in with the Ford SA corporate campaign, which talks about the global company's commitment to this country and its long history here.

Both send a warm message to consumers. And for that, the FWF ad, and the foundation itself, get an Orchid from me.



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Danette Breitenbach 28 Jul 2022



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It is easy to sympathise with Ukraine: After all, it has been invaded by a country run by someone who wants to relive the glories of Imperial Russia and its brutal successor, the Soviet Union. The suffering inflicted on the Ukrainian people doesn't need much to explain...so there is almost an endless ocean of compassion for them – at least in most of the Western world.

Turkey's Baykar Tech – the company which makes the drones the Ukrainians have been using to visit death and destruction on the Russian invaders – has virtually had to do no marketing, because the news channels have been fighting the evidence of their effectiveness.

However, now Baykar Tech has gone even further in its own "corporate social investment" in its community, by refusing to take payment for a Bayraktar drone "crowd-funded" by people in Poland. Baykar Tech sent the drone to Ukraine – and then said they would send the money to charities looking after civilians affected by the conflict.

Great idea, great PR and great marketing – so an Orchid for Baykar Tech.



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Less of a great idea – more of a “what the hell were they thinking” moment – was the *Vogue* magazine photo shoot done by iconic photographer Annie Leibowitz of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky and his wife Olena.

Seriously? While your people are dying around you, you and your wife pose in your official residences and office and in the “front line”?

You don't need to do this, Mr President. Everybody knows you're fighting for your life. By doing this, you look like a spoiled dilettante.

For insensitive marketing – which generated a storm of adverse comments around the world – you get an Onion, Mr Zelensky. Fire your PR advisers if they did not tell you not to do it.

### 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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