

Heartening reminders that life can be sweet



By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Actors, so the adage goes, are warned to avoid sharing the limelight with animals or children - because the audience will be a sucker for the "cute factor" and ignore anything and anyone else.

The same, though, is not necessarily true for advertising, because if you can get the cute factor to work in favour of your brand, then you're halfway home in getting across your marketing message.

There have been some notable campaigns in the past couple of years where animals and kids have lifted ordinary ads into the stratosphere of memorability.

I am thinking now of Toyota's "Buddy", the talking dog, a boxer, used to flog everything from Hiluxes to used cars. Then there was the almost impossibly cute and innocent little girl who tried to teach her Daddy the delicate art of dipping and eating Oreo biscuits.

There is another cute kid in town - the girl in the latest Wimpy TV ad. She is cute, she is innocent, but at the same time a bit worldly-wise because she knows her father is a clown... and she elevates the ad into the realm of feel-good, which is no bad thing for a brand.

We see a father and his daughter sitting down to eat in a Wimpy. Mom sits down and looks at her plate, asking where one of her cheese griller sausages has gone.

Daddy, all innocent, blames Mr Cuddles, the big fluffy bear sitting next to his daughter on the other side of the table.

The little girl shakes her head in disbelief, pointing out that Mr Cuddles is a "vege-matarian". To which Devious Dad responds that, on this particular day, Teddy is a meat eater. The girl shakes her head. "This guy..." she mutters.

The closing shot points out what you can get in the Fresh Start breakfast for R39.90 - which includes three (not two, Dad) cheese grillers.

It's an ad that cannot but make you feel good because when we see the world through the eyes of innocents we are reminded it is not such a bad place after all. And we need all we can get of that sort of feeling, in the face of the aridity and disenchantment (as the poem *Desiderata* puts it) all around us these days.



Orchids to Wimpy, FCB Joburg and Egg Films.

One of the things that irritates me most are pop-up ads on websites. I can understand why so many computer and mobile users are downloading ad-blocking software. However, I surprised myself by not only noticing one the other day, but by clicking on it.

I am in the market for car insurance and I suppose the timing was right. I was interested to see if the hype around OUTsurance was anything more than hype, so I filled in the necessary details. When I had finished, up popped a message saying: someone is calling you to talk about this. Not "will call", but "is calling".

Yeah, right... the one thing in which South African business is a world leader is not returning calls.

But even as I was thinking these thoughts - and even before I had closed the window on the site - my phone rang. OUTsurance.

The call centre salesman introduced himself as Angelo Graham and then took me painstakingly through the process of getting a quote. I realise he would have been working from a script but, even so, he sounded knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and at the same time not pushy and arrogant, as some call centre people can be.

The experience was an eye-opener for me because it showed a brand that walked the walk to back up its marketing talk. The whole call centre experience and lead initiation is the slickest I have yet experienced in South Africa.

And it's a model for the rest of our substandard call centres. Here's a thought, OUTsurance: could you not second some of your people to Telkom or City Power for just a week or so? Please...

In the end, we opted to stay with our brokers because there was little difference in the quotes and we didn't want to complicate our financial lives.

However, it was a close-run thing and I would have been quite happy to sign up with OUTsurance. This also proves that a widespread campaign across all media types can work - I'd had OUTsurance at the back of my mind from all its print and TV ads, and seeing the website pop-up pushed it to the front of my mind.

So, an Orchid to OUTsurance for an effective multimedia ad campaign, for delivering on its promise, and for setting the benchmark for other call centres. Oh, and one also to Angelo Graham. I know you didn't get any commission out of the non-sale, Angelo, but I have a feeling you are going to go far as an entrepreneur.

While on the subject of call centres, let me introduce the Call Centre from Hell. My wife's phone has been ringing at least half a dozen times a day with an 031 (Durban) code or a withheld number. She didn't answer and when she told me about it, I Googled the number. Very useful.

I found a site where there were a number of complaints about this number. All those who commented were angry about the repeated calls and harassment and the aggressive nature of the call-centre person on the other end.

Turns out this is a company called Mobiles Plus, which apparently targets MTN customers with cellphone offers. The problem is that the targeting is so random that sometimes when people answer, the line is dead. On other occasions, people turn down the offer and ask not to be called again - only to receive an SMS saying they will be updated.

It is aggressive, intrusive marketing and it has annoyed many people. On Hellopeter.com there are 125 entries for [Mobiles Plus](#). Only three are positive. That tells a story.

So an Onion to Mobiles Plus.

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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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