

There's no monopoly on capital doing good

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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When a brand does good for the society in which it exists, it can have powerful positive effects not only on its image, but also on sales.

But I am not going to talk about the recent outpouring of support from business for those affected by the Knysna fires... because there are a couple of obvious questions which hang in the air, like: Why only now and why here?

A much more positive involvement of a brand in a worthwhile community project is that of petfood maker Hill's in The Underdog Project in Cape Town.

Aimed at helping "at risk" youngsters from deprived communities find something worthwhile in their lives, but at the same time doing something for animal welfare, the Underdog Project puts township kids together with animals. They learn how to look after them – feeding them exercising them and just plain loving them.

Along the way, they develop more self-respect and the belief that there is more to life than just looking out for yourself.



Hill's The Underdog Project in Cape Town

I have no doubt that they will go on to become productive and valuable members of society and no drop-outs, drug addicts and criminals.

And, as for the dogs, they simply love it.

Apart from sponsoring food and other inputs for the project, Hill's worked with SABC's TV breakfast show, Expresso, to put together a really heart-warming video about the project. In the glum times we live in at the moment, just watching that is good for the soul.

I quite like the concept of Expresso, because it is doing what I have long advocated media companies do: use "native advertising" or advertorial without compromising on editorial quality or integrity. I say that because the days of editorial being more than an arm's length away from commercial in media companies are long gone.

There is no need for blatant crass publicity when you're doing campaigns like this: Hill's remained in the background and allowed Expresso to tell the story.

The producers of the show have managed to achieve what a lot of others have failed to do in native advertising: position the brand in the background as a facilitator. Consumers are not stupid. They can see when there is commercial involvement and will be willing to accept that as long as the content they are getting is good.



With the Underdog Project, Hill's has done exactly that and maintained authenticity, which is key to this sort of community social responsibility marketing.

So, an Orchid to Hill's and another to Expresso for showing us how it's done.

And, of course, a huge shout-out to the people involved in the Underdog Project.

When it comes to public relations, good practitioners always remain in the background. Bell Pottinger, the London flacks who put together the infamous "white monopoly capital" campaign on behalf of the Guptas, the Zuma camp and assorted running dogs, have tried unsuccessfully to do that.

But, now that their name is out there, it is good to see South Africans of all persuasions "cyber-bombing" them on their Twitter account. The company appears to have stopped posting its own Tweets, because angry South Africans have been bombarding them with uniformly negative comment over the past few weeks.

The company's site is still up and running but one of the senior partners, Victoria Geoghegan, has effectively closed hers down to outsiders, by "protecting" her Tweets, which means you can only post a Tweet to her if you are an approved

follower.



Heat in the kitchen getting a bit too much for you, Victoria?

The problem is the you violating one of the basic rules of PR (which very few in the business follow): don't stick your head above the publicity parapet. And don't have a social media profile at all.

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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