

# Rescue dogs in fashion

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

27 Apr 2021

*Two Orchids: Claw photo shoot captures beauty and yearning; PR agency SWM gets Orion for poor copy...*

In our family, we've always had animals around – mainly cats and dogs and, when the kids were younger, everything from rats to hamsters to “silky” chickens.

When it comes to dogs and cats, though, we definitely work on the principle of “adopt don't shop” and, over the years, have offered many of them a “forever home”.

Which is by way of declaring, upfront, my bias towards organisations and people involved in animal welfare.

Our last three dogs have come from Claw SA (Community Led Animal Welfare), which is based at Durban Deep on the West Rand. My friend Cheryl, who will go to almost any lengths to help an animal in distress, introduced me and I am still in awe of the work they do.

It is heartbreaking to see the animals in enclosures jumping for joy when they see people arrive... hoping to go to that forever home. Our second dog from Claw,

Shadow, was a six-year-old who had never been adopted and, in the short time he was with us – he had serious health problems nobody knew about but which eventually took him – he knew he was home. Ditto with our current two, sitting outside in the sun, probably dreaming of “walkies” in the morning. We might be at our limit for dogs – adopting is a serious commitment – but I was still nevertheless drawn to a series of still images done for Claw by photographer Emma O'Brien featuring dogs up for adoption.



The project was done on behalf of the welfare organisation and Boss dog food and was arranged along the lines of a “fashion shoot”, with the dogs as the stars.

Judging from the behind-the-scenes video the crew and volunteers were stretched at times as the animals blundered around the carefully arranged backdrop of flowers. But they’re all happy – perhaps they realise this is the beginning of a way out?

The photos are stunning and capture the beauty – and the yearning – of animals to be part of a family. The images are a highly effective tool to showcase rescue dogs... and therefore they do an excellent job of marketing for Claw. Orchids to O'Brien for the brilliant photography and to Boss dog food for supporting such a worthwhile cause.

And, last but not least, Claw gets an Orchid for the way in which they have used professional marketing principles – and professionals – in a very worthwhile cause.

I was having a conversation the other day with a PR person I know and respect (yes, they do exist...). She was remarking that she gets quite a lot of work doing writing jobs for PR agencies who don't possess this talent in-house.

This person was, in a previous lifetime, a journalist and, even though I am biased towards exhacks in the marketing sector, I still believe that a PR agency which doesn't understand the media or, more importantly, how to tell a good story, shouldn't be taking clients' money.

I get all manner of time-wasting press releases cluttering up my inbox, but even by the subterranean standards of that lot, a missive from SWM Communications, for its client, Knight Piésold, stood out for how bad it was.

Who? I hear you ask. I am reasonably well read and generally aware of what is happening in South Africa – it is my job as an editor – but I had no idea who Knight Piésold was. So – silly me – I read on in the hope I would find out.

The breathless heading proclaimed: “Uniquely African Story”. “Changing the Paradigm for Knight Piésold – Adapt, Transform and Grow.” I discovered the company was 100 years old but nothing in the covering press release indicated what field it was involved in.

Mistake Number Two. (The first was sending me the release on my mail, but referring to me as “Michel”. He is our photo editor.) I then clicked on a link to find the release in Word.

Mistake Number Three. Don't send attachments or links to busy journalists. If you are going to “shotgun” them with your words, at least include them in the body of the e-mail.

The 1,200 word release (Mistake Number Four: No one is going to read, let alone run, anything that long) still didn't inform me, until the second page, of what Knight Piésold does. It seems to be an engineering consulting company which, in its century of existence, has been involved in some major projects in southern Africa. Do not tell me, SWM Communications, that you could not find an interesting story in the company's history and tell that in a way that acknowledges the importance and skills of engineers (especially now that we're taking on Cubans to help us).

A true communications professional would have relished the challenge of turning civil engineering into dramatic, sexy copy.

Sadly, that's not you, SWM Communications. Maybe you should hire in an expert...

In the meantime, this incompetent use of a valuable marketing tool, public relations, means you get an Onion from me.

## 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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