

CANINE CORNER

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The Trustpower Dog

Launched on 31 October, a commercial for Trustpower grabbed the attention of many dog lovers around New Zealand and continues to do so.

Telling the story of an amputee widower who stops at an animal shelter to adopt a dog, only to discover that his canine soulmate is also an amputee, this commercial penetrated my consciousness the way few commercials do. I am not alone if the amount of coverage the ad has received on radio and social media is anything to go by. I sat down with Carolyn Schofield, the Head of Brand for Trustpower, to get more information on the creative process behind the advertisement.

"Trustpower was the first business to combine electricity, gas and telco services," says Carolyn. "Our brand tagline is 'Meant to be Together' and so we seek to film stories along this theme.

"I work with a small creative team at advertising agency Art & Industry. The team developed a list of approximately 15 story ideas including the dog story. We actually chose two other stories to test, which is a process of using focus groups and neurological response monitoring."

Moving story boards are used to outline the proposed commercial for focus group participants while sensors attached to their fingers measure their emotional response.



"What people say is their response can be very different from what their underlying physiological response is," Carolyn says. "So we use both their interviews and their sensor readings to determine if we are on track with our advertising goals.

"It became clear when reviewing the results that neither story we had outlined for the focus groups was hitting the mark for emotional response. It dawned on us that we had to do the dog story because that is what the viewers were looking for in a story to portray 'Meant to be Together'."

A casting call for both humans and canines was placed. Animals on Q, a firm operated by dog trainer Mark Vette, found Blue for the canine lead. Blue is an ex-Agility dog who developed osteosarcoma at age 11. The human actor is not an amputee, but he was the right age demographic and a seasoned professional. The scene on the beach at the end of the ad uses a body double who is a real-life amputee.

"A successful commercial builds value in the long term for the company by increasing recognition of the brand and developing the consumer's connection to the brand. They may not need your service immediately, but they will remember you when it comes time for them to make a purchasing choice. We think we've done that with this commercial", says Carolyn.

The commercial was an eight-month effort which included filming in the Auckland region under COVID-19 Alert Level 3 conditions. Schofield, who is based at the company's head office in Tauranga, could only participate in the filming via a Zoom connection, a career first for her.

This is the second time Trustpower has used dogs in its advertising. You may remember a commercial from four years ago (pictured to the left) which used puppies dressed in costumes matching the colours of the Trustpower logo. 🐾

After this article had been submitted, we learned that Blue had passed away, on 10 January 2022. Our thoughts are with Blue's human family.