

Face-to-face with Ikalafeng

Brands can better ROI

Mr Thebe Ikalafeng is the Managing Director of Brand Leadership. In a candid interview with *TeleScope* Editor Oiva Angula, Mr Ikalafeng gives his insights into the Telecom Namibia brand audit currently being spearheaded by his consultancy.

TeleScope: *Can you tell us about Brand Leadership – the scope of its practice, a little history?*

Ikalafeng: Brand Leadership, led by former marketing director for NIKE for the African continent, Thebe Ikalafeng, is Africa's first strategy consultancy that integrates research, intellectual property (law), strategy, design and brand valuation (finance and marketing). It's leadership brings a wealth of experience in the business of leading and nurturing brands, honed at leading global brand organizations such as NIKE, Intebrand (London), Colgate Palmolive and Wits University, across all marketing disciplines. That experience ensures that clients have the benefit not only of global best practices but also of sound academic and practical insights.

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IN THIS FILE photo Mr Thebe Ikalafeng (right) is seen with the Telecom MD Mr Frans Ndoroma. The picture was taken on February 9 with the signing of the agreement with Brand Leadership.

TeleScope: *What is Telecom Namibia expecting you to do to the brand?*

Ikalafeng: To position TN for the future. To ensure TN has a lasting meaningful customer centric value proposition and a sustainable proposition against competition. To give the brand a consistent, coherent and cohesive point of difference in the market place.

TeleScope: *Why do they feel the brand needed an overhaul? Do they feel the brand has run aground?*

Ikalafeng: Three key reasons. First, the TN brand as it exists has been around since 1992. All major brands need a face-lift every eight to ten years, to make it relevant to changing consumer needs and against new competition. Second, the arrival of cellular network, MTC,

potential arrival of SNO and cross border offerings such as MTN and Vodacom has introduced into the market place customer centric value proposition that are beginning to or will in future take away valued consumers from TN. Finally, the strength of the TN brand has been diluted by the silo use of internal organisation structures (the four business units) which have been developed as business customer facing brands.

TeleScope: *Does a brand overhaul also mean an overhaul of the corporate image?*

Not necessarily. But in the instance of TN, there may be a need to consolidate the customer facing

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brand identity or identities of the business.

TeleScope: *What is the ultimate objective for redesigning a brand? Is it a better bottom-line, or better service?*

Ikalafeng: Brands are valuable, and their primary objective is to present a sustainable competitive advantage for the business that enhance and maximise shareholder ROI (return on investment). To the customer they are a value proposition, a promise to deliver against identified or new customer needs, consistently such that customers identify with the brands as a necessary part of their lives.

TeleScope: *Is a better bottom-line a factor?*

Ikalafeng: All businesses are there to yield a positive ROI. Otherwise they are a philanthropic proposition, with no profit motives. TN is a business, a solid Namibian benchmark business and brand Namibians look to make personal connections.

“...TN is one of Namibia’s highest rated brands with a high top of mind recall...”

TeleScope: *In your first report findings, you talk about intellectual property audits. Can you give some groundwork for our readers. What is an intellectual property audit? What is the significance of one?*

Ikalafeng: The former CEO of Quaker Oats John Stewart once said:

If this business were split up, I will give you the land

And bricks and mortar,

And I will take the brands and trademarks,

And I’ll fare better than you.

The purpose of Intellectual Property Audit is to assess the

“Brand Leadership’s role is to empower the client with the skills to manage the brand after the project is concluded.”

existence and extent of protection for the firm’s intellectual properties – trade marks, copy rights, patents, etc. – which give it differentiation and a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

It is a process for developing a strategy to adequately and proactively manage the firms’ intellectual properties.

TeleScope: *Considering that the client – in this case Telecom Namibia – is working hand-in-hand with Brand Leadership on the audit, what is the role of the client. Can you define that for us generally?*

Ikalafeng: The client the ultimate custodian of the brand. Brand Leadership’s role is to empower the client with the skills to manage the brand after the project is concluded. More importantly, the client’s role is to ensure that all key stakeholders on the brand are taken on the journey of discovery for the brand – to get buy in of all stakeholders, internal and external.

TeleScope: *Companies have three identities: what they are, what they think they are and what others think they are. What is your experience with Telecom Namibia?*

Ikalafeng: As a brand, TN is one of Namibia’s highest rated brands with a high top of mind recall, as both the internal and external research revealed. But the structure of the brand organisation has multiple customer facing propositions, which may ultimately dilute the strong mother brand, TN. The business presents the mother brand, four business brands and several product brands to the consumer, making it very difficult to build equity in one brand, or leverage the strength of the mother brand to build equity and ROI. The ultimate arbiter of brands and resultant

profitability is the consumer, and Marty Neuemeir in his book “Brand Gap” summed it up brilliantly when he said: A brand is not what you say it is, it is what they (customers) say it is. But at the end of the day, the TN team of brand custodians is some of the most committed brand custodians and ambassadors. By appointing a brand consultancy to undertake the audit shows their commitment to ensuring that this brand goes beyond all our personal needs, and returns positively to consumers and shareholders. From the MD, Mr Frans Ndoroma, GM of marketing Amanda Timotheus, the [promotions] managers Leonie and Mr [Stoffel] Swartz, you couldn’t ask for better commitment. They are ideal clients because they know and value what the TN brand can do for all.

TeleScope: *Is there a particular method of work that you follow in brand auditing?*

Ikalafeng: We are doing a multiple level of brand audit using proprietary methodologies focusing on five key outputs – Visual Audit, Communications Audit, Stakeholder Insights, Brand Dilution and Intellectual Property. The key output of all is the TN brand blueprint – the positioning of brand TN.

TeleScope: *Is it your first brand audit assignment in Namibia? Is there anything unique about doing a brand audit for a Namibian company?*

Ikalafeng: Yes. But we know it’s not going to be our only time we work with Namibian businesses. We are exploring several ways we can partner Namibian businesses to add mutual value. Namibians and South Africans have a long history, and cross border initiatives will strengthen the growing partnership and SADC value proposition.