

HOW TO BE A GREAT BRAND

The way you brand yourself will determine how customers see you and how they feel about what you do. Here's how to make sure your brand tells the right story. **BY KIM GARNER**

Make no mistake – your brand is an asset. 'For the world's most valuable and most admired brands such as Coca-Cola, Google and Apple, more than 50% of their value is their intellectual property,' says Thebe Ikalafeng, branding expert and founder and chairperson of Brand Leadership Group. If you've decided to build a company, you've taken on the task of building a brand – and the way in which you position it (from its look and feel to its message, ethos and focus) can make or break your business. 'Most people confuse branding with logos,' says Ikalafeng. 'A brand is everything that a customer engages with when they come into contact with your product, service, staff, store – everything. When developing a brand, the logo is the last expression after developing the value proposition, the "tag line" and brand story.'

In fact, a good brand is really a well-told story. 'Take the Nando's story about the Portuguese journey and peri-peri chicken preparation,' says Ikalafeng. 'There is no such person or event but it's an appealing story that helps to differentiate the brand from the dominant KFC story. People don't just buy a brand for its functional fulfilment but for what it says about them and does for them emotionally. Great brands help build recognition, preference, loyalty, trust and resilience during crises.'

WANT TO BE ONE OF THESE GREAT BRANDS? HERE ARE THEBE IKALAFENG'S FIVE ATTRIBUTES OF A GREAT BRAND

► CLARITY

'Great brands are clear about what they promise and what they stand for. It's what we call their "value proposition". Clarity makes it easier to tell your brand story, differentiate it and to attract the right target market. For example, the choice between Mercedes, BMW and Volvo is not based on whether the car will get you from A to B, but on how it will make you feel about yourself if you're associated with it. Mercedes promises a choice between "the best or nothing", BMW says it's "sheer driving pleasure" and Volvo promises safety. The key to clarity is authenticity.'

► DISTINCTIVENESS

'It should be easy to distinguish your brand – not only from its value proposition but from how that's expressed through your brand's identity, packaging and communication. Great brands often own a word, colour, symbol, tone, sound or another distinguishing attribute. All of them are intellectual property. It's easy to spot the Coca-Cola brand, even without its name, based solely on the white ribbon and the ubiquitous red. If you remove the Nando's name from its logo, you'd still recognise it because of its unique typography.'

► CONSISTENCY

'Great brands are consistent in what they stand for and promise and how they present themselves over time. Since its launch, MTN has only ever been yellow – its packaging, its stores, its campaigns. When MTN sponsored the SAMAs, they laid out the "yellow carpet". Such consistency across all touch points reinforces and makes it easy to remember and recognise the brand. The one lesson that's ingrained in my mind from my

days as chief marketing officer for Nike for Africa was a statement by then-president of the Nike group, Thomas Clarke – the secret of Nike's success is to be "boringly consistent".'

► ADAPTATION

'Great brands adapt to changes in their environment and consumers. Not long ago, Kodak was the dominant brand in film, imaging and photography. That was before Samsung, Apple and Nokia added cameras to their phones. Because it failed to adapt to the digital space, Kodak was forced into bankruptcy in 2012. It was the end of a brand that didn't define itself within the "experience" (capturing experiences and memories). Instead, it defined itself within "film" and "imaging", which died when cellphones expanded into their territory – in step with consumers.'

► ACCESSIBILITY

'A brand, even the most exclusive, is not a secret, and should be easily accessible to those it's aimed at. These days, it's almost impossible to exist without a digital footprint – a website and social-media channels. It should be part of your brand to communicate with consumers whose lives (and businesses) revolve around smartphones. When deciding where to locate your brand, you need to understand where consumers are located – emotionally, physically and mentally. When Apple launched its new iWatch, it was only available online. This was a statement – the most fanatic Apple consumers already have smartphones and are digitally connected.'

BRANDING TIPS FROM THE 'BOS'

When branding's done right, it makes your business stand out from a crowd. Just ask Grant Rushmere, co-founder of Bos Ice Tea – the internationally recognised ice-tea brand, known for its impeccable branding and brand message. Here are his tips for successful branding.

► Know your market

The better you understand the market, the more likely it is that you'll create something original. Having a critical 'point of difference' gives you the best chance of success.

► Give it meaning

Use your brand to tell a story. The more depth you create the better. People identify with brands on a human level so the more of a 'persona' you create, the easier it is to identify with.

► Keep it simple

Your branding should capture your idea in its simplest and clearest form. This will allow clarity for your marketing direction. The simpler the idea, the more marketing options you have, and the more likely the marketing will communicate your ideas clearly.

► Live with your brand

A great idea today sometimes diminishes over time so try to get an example as close as possible to how it will look and feel when finished, and then give it time. If it grows on you then you know you have something. If it fades you know there is still work to be done. ■