

# Delivering a branded service

**Thebe Ikalafeng**

**P**UBLIC Sector brands are some of today's most powerful and engaging brands, they elicit strong and varied interest and reactions among a wide range of stakeholders. Every citizen feels they have a stake in them. And they do. The number of public sector brands has grown exponentially in recent years.

Governments across all their spheres, their agencies and State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) are all actively building brands to connect to their customers – the citizens.

There are several drivers behind this proliferation, the growth of government and its extension into all aspects of society, devolution and outsourcing, and the realisation by those in the public sector that branding can help articulate and promote their policies and ideas.

Gone are the days when the public sector was seen as a bureaucratic institution. Government departments are now actively pursuing brand-driven strategies to be open, approachable and citizen-driven – using all tools of the trade, and even the language, used in the private sector.

There is one thing governments across all spheres now acutely understand: their customers – citizens – live in a branded world. To relate and get to them, the public sector needs to connect via brands.

But while the private sector is primarily driven by the profit motive, the public sector has a mandate to work on behalf of the people, creating goods and services that improve their well being, while demonstrating prudence with public money. In the private sector, customers vote strictly with their wallets. In the public sector, they exercise their vote – and in many ways their wallets – by choosing not to comply with their tax obligations.

Success in public sector marketing and branding is complex because of the nature and role of the public sector, reporting structures and decision-making. You need stakeholder engagement and alignment of all activities.

So, if government is now a brand, would you buy it?

The Public Sector Excellence initiative, anchored by the Public Sector Excellence Reputation Index, is an independent vehicle to assess how everyday South Africans evaluate the performance of the public sector – how they're buying "government and its services". The survey, across a set of public service attributes, is derived from a representative, national sample weighted to represent adult population estimates from StatsSA across suburbs, towns and villages. The results – not sponsored by government – truly are a measure of "what the people think about the impact of the initiatives driven by those they put in government".

The winners – both organisations and campaigns – reflect the views of the peo-



**Thebe Ikalafeng – MD, Brand Leadership Group and founder, Public Sector Excellence initiative.**



## The winners reflect views of citizens

ple. But of course not all public sector organisations and campaigns are public-facing such as the Department of Social Development and Department of Health, and SOEs such as SAA, SABC and Eskom. But their impact is facilitated by other departments, such as SARS, Communications, National Treasury, Public Enterprises and Performance Monitoring,

Evaluation and Administration which are charged with developing overarching policies, which drive efficiencies and productivity, collect money and plan for sustainability and success.

So every department and SOE is important. And in an overcommunicated world, where government competes for people's time, branding helps to cut through the clutter.

And as the saying goes, "what gets measured, gets done". The Public Sector Excellence initiative is for people to give an independent view and signal to its public servant – government and its agencies. For government and its agencies, it's a way to measure the impact of its efforts.



## Industry leaders through innovation

The brand value unlocked for Destination SA after the World Cup is immeasurable. This is according to Thandiwe January-McLean, Chief Executive Officer, South African Tourism (SAT).

"Not only did the event increase the positive perceptions of our country, but we laid the groundwork for continued improvement in tourist arrivals," she says. "Hosting the event proved to be catalyst for infrastructure development, which will continue to serve the tourism industry for many years to follow."

According to January-McLean, leveraging the many advantages has been a major consideration for SAT in the months following the World Cup. "We welcomed close to 680 000\* visitors to our shores. Through positive experiences, many have become cogent brand ambassadors for South Africa. Our task now is to ensure that the expectations set out by these visitors are met by ensuring a consistency in service levels, world-class experiences and memorable moments."

Through campaigns such as the recently launched 20-Experiences-in-Ten Days global campaign, SAT has harnessed the power of peer-to-peer marketing by offering unrivalled experience-based trips for four international couples. Each couple documented their trip and SAT captured highlights of their South African experience.

"This allowed for authentic, consumer-based material to be aired globally through television, cinema and corresponding online campaigns," she continues. "I believe this is a pertinent example of the evolving marketing strategy SAT has developed in line with the dynamic environment in which we operate."

Tourism remains an important driver of economic growth and job creation, contributing 7.9% to the GDP in 2009; an increase of an estimated 2.7% the previous year. With a thorough research-backed understanding of key market segments and triggers, SAT has been able to maintain a strong presence in international and local markets.

"The tourism industry has changed over the last two years, given the tough economic times experienced globally," she says. "While we will continue our mandate to increase tourist arrivals year-on-year, we've acknowledged the need to embrace innovative and engaging strategies in order to achieve this." To this end, travellers can look forward to increased engagement with various SAT-owned platforms, including increased focus on social media and e-marketing. "Given that nearly 80% of travellers make use of digital platforms to make purchasing decision, our marketing efforts and strategies need to support and embrace the online culture," concludes McLean.

This dynamic attitude, together with a solid corporate governance foundation has allowed South African Tourism to maintain their position as the authority in the local tourism industry.

\*Table A Arrival Stats, July 2010



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