

Branding Africa with pride

Thebe Ikalafeng is showcasing continent’s marketing concepts



MUNYA VOMO

PRE-EMINENT global African brand architect, adviser and author Thebe Ikalafeng is by far one of the country’s brightest minds when it comes to brand awareness. Over the years he led Nike to be the number one brand in Africa, and worked on more than 100 leading African brands such as Brand Ghana, Transnet, University of South Africa (Unisa). His résumé boasts of successful political branding campaigns for Presidents Atta Mills and John Mahama of Ghana, Brand South Africa, SA Tourism, Mercantile Bank and WWF. Ikalafeng is the founder of the foremost pan-African brand and reputation firm, Brand Leadership Group.

When did you know you would be in branding?
I started out studying accounting at Wits, but dropped out to go to the US. One evening at an African get-together I met an old acquaintance from Wits who asked me what I was coming to study. When I said to him I’d be completing my accounting degree, he said I didn’t look like an accountant, but more like a marketer. I didn’t actively listen to what he said but I eventually drifted into marketing and completed my undergraduate degree cum laude with an American Marketing Association award for academic excellence. After my MBA and 80 job applications, the only one that

returned positive was a brand management position at Colgate Palmolive in New York. That’s how I started in branding.

In brief what does the process of brand management entail?
A brand is everything – it’s the product, it’s communication, the customer experience and reputation. It’s a promise made and a promise delivered. Our job is to create, nurture and leverage that reputation, that promise, sustainably and profitably.

When maintaining a brand, is it something one can switch on and off, say when need be?
Great brands are built on clear, coherent and consistent values over time. Think about Coke when it decided to switch their “taste” in 1986, and was roundly rejected. It cost them millions. Think of a bank who’s basic fiduciary promise is anchored on trust. If they are inconsistent with their custodianship of your money/asset would you bank with them?
But like everything else in life, you can enhance or destroy that which makes you distinctive and valuable.

Rapper Jay-Z was attacked by sister-in-law Solange while his wife Beyoncé watched? What’s your take on what the incident did to their individual brands?
One doesn’t know the particular circumstances or context of this incident so it’s difficult to conclude what impact it had on their brands. But by not retaliating, it certainly didn’t affect Jay-Z’s brand

the way the Chris Brown/Rihanna matter completely transformed Brown’s public image, negatively. Ditto with Beyoncé. Meanwhile if one goes by media speculation of the circumstances, all it did was paint Solange as frustrated, desperate, spoilt and ambitious. Not exactly a transgression.

In your opinion who are some of the local celebrities that know how to run their brands really well?
Lucas Radebe, Bassie Kumalo, Bonang Matheba, Gareth Cliff, DJ Fresh and Yvonne Chaka Chaka have done an incredible job.

You are one of the pioneering male style icons, having been recognised as Best Dressed Man in South Africa by the likes of Fairlady, GQ and Style magazine among others, and the late Gwen Gill describing you as ‘terminally stylish’. What informs your dress sense?
I don’t dress to impress, but rather to honour the occasion, simplicity and reflect my personality. I don’t necessarily put much thought into it beyond that. But then again, it’s how I was raised. It’s not anything that’s come with where I am in life today, but how I was raised. I don’t spend too much time worrying about clothes, but I’m aware of the impact they have.

If it wasn’t for this line of work, what would you have done with your life?
If I had followed what teachers and my school results were rather than where my life led me, I’d be a doctor – I wasn’t bad at all in maths and science. But then I can’t stand blood. Perhaps a teacher as well as that’s what I’ve pretty much done all my life – and still do. I absolutely enjoy sharing knowledge and shaping ideas.

You are always on the move, all over the world, what’s your favourite destination?
Africa is my home and inspiration, it offers me 54 unique, diverse and incomparable experiences: But if I have to single any few, it would be Rwanda for its incredible undulating mountains, clinically clean streets and overcoming the unimaginable 1994 genocide.

You have had a successful career thus far, what else is in your bucket-list?
I’ve been blessed, but I’ve put in the hours. I have only simple goals in life... to be happy with the choices I make and how I’ve applied my talents, and to contribute to the renaissance and global reputation of Africa.
What do you do to relax?
I’ll have enough time to do that when I’m dead. I don’t believe in relaxing and balance. We have limited time on Earth and I want to spend every bit of it pursuing a worthy and happy life.

Do you have any favourite local team?
Despite his greatest efforts, Stuart Baxter will not succeed in making me lose faith in Kaizer Chiefs. We got to do something with the national team as one can’t divorce the country. I don’t see how we can achieve success in rugby but constantly fall short in football and choke in cricket. Something is not right.

Is there any sport that you are remotely good at?
I retired from tennis and football at the top of my game, when I couldn’t possibly be any worse or better. Since then, I’m unchallenged as an F1, tennis and football supporter. In football, I support Arsenal, Manchester City and Chelsea.

Compared to the world, where is South Africa when it comes to brands?
South Africa is recognised as a brand-builder. We have the world’s #2 brewer brand, SABMiller and one of top 100 Most Valuable Brands in the world, MTN. Our flag is one of the top 5 most recognised in the world, flown by the undisputed 21st humanity brand, Nelson Mandela. Of the Top 100 Most Valuable African brands, SA’s share is 72 percent, followed by Nigeria at 26 percent and Kenya at 2 percent according to the Brand Africa 100. Across all sectors, especially financial services, telecommunications and retail, we are the undisputed branding standard in Africa.



DYNAMIC: Catch the Irish dance show ‘Spirit of the Dance’ at The Mandela at Joburg Theatre in its 6th season.

Guide to the Good Life

DANCE, JOZI: Catch the Irish dance show *Spirit of the Dance* back for its sixth season at The Mandela at Joburg Theatre. Featuring a blend of traditional culture in show-stopping Irish dance with the Latino rhythms of Tango, Flamenco and Salsa.

This year’s production features the voices of singing stars The Irish Angels, a three-girl harmony group who sing traditional Irish songs like *Danny Boy*, through to foot-stomping anthems. This year the producers have included dance pieces styled on American Tap. And the new finale is the famous hit *Love Rock ‘n Roll*. From June 3 to June 15. Tickets from R165 at www.joburgtheatre.com or call 0861 670 670. Also at Soveto-based Pick n Pay stores.

ART PRETORIA: 21 *Trees of Tales*, an exhibition of works on paper by Ilze Jansen van Rensburg is on at the Association of Arts, Mackie Street, Pretoria. With her first solo exhibition she extols the wonders of trees she discovered from early childhood in her fantasy world of fairy tales. For her they symbolise protection, a primordial force and an old-world wisdom. At the Association of Arts gallery in Nieuw Muckleneuk, Pretoria, until June 11. Go to: www.artsassociationпта.co.za.

CHILDREN’S SHOW JOZI: The Peoples Theatre brings Disney’s *Pinocchio* to life from now to August 10. The classic Disney story is told from the perspective of toy maker Gepetto, and follows the adventures of the little wooden puppet magically brought to life by the Blue Fairy, who tells him he can become a real boy if he proves himself to be “brave, truthful, and unselfish”. Pinocchio’s efforts involve encounters with a host of unsavoury characters. At the Peoples Theatre, corner of Loveday and Hoofd streets in the Joburg Theatre Complex in Braamfontein. For more info call 011 403 1563, e-mail info@peoplestheatre.co.za or visit www.peoplestheatre.co.za.

MUSIC, JOZI: The Auto & General Theatre on the Square in Sandton presents a series of musical programmes every Friday at 1pm. This year leading South African classical

musicians, established and up-and-coming, will again be presented – as well as special guest performers from England, the Netherlands, Israel, Austria, Bulgaria and Italy. Tickets R40 at the theatre from 12.30am include coffee and biscuits. This Friday, June 6, catch the Goldberg Chamber Players, on June 13 a French programme with works by Saint-Saëns, Poulenc, Honegger and Widor performed by Mome van Heerden (clarinet) and Jenny Venter (piano). Call 011 883 8606.

INDIAN FILM SCREENINGS, JOZI: See a selection of short films, documentaries and feature films highlighting the Indian “experimental” cinema or Cinéma of Prayoga through the theory of the Indian film curator and philosopher Amrit Gangar. Cinema of Prayoga is a conceptual framework that locates the history of experimental film in India within an ancient history of pre-modern tradition of innovation, of prayoga. It is a theory of filmic practice, which challenges the dominant forms of filmic expression in contemporary India, including the all-pervading contemporary Bollywood or the social realism of Indian New Wave. Today, on Sunday, June 1, at 7pm, *Blood Earth* by Kush Badhwar, *Brahma Vishnu Shiva* by RV Ramani and *In the name of a River* by Anup Singh. More info: www.thebioscope.co.za.

JAZZ, CAPE TOWN: The 14th Sekunjalo Edujazz Concert takes place at The Artscape Theatre on June 14 at 730pm, bringing together school jazz bands mentored under some of the Western Cape’s most talented educators in workshops held all year. The line-up features Ifidyoli String Project, UWC Wind Jazz Orchestra and special guest Jimmy Nevis. The proceeds provide educational bursaries for disadvantaged students and promote the rich culture of jazz among the youth. More than 75 schools benefit annually from this project which allows young students to express their creative talent and perform with well-known South African musicians on international stages. Tickets R80 at Computicket. For info, call Cherie Hendricks or Yvette Davids on: 021 427 1400.

Our minds hand psycho killers, real or imagined, a brand new life

THE OTHER night I was too terrified to enter my bathroom alone. I feared that some crazed killer was going to pop out of my shower.
To prevent this from occurring – as if – I slithered into the room with my back up against the wall in a manner recalling Bruce Willis in an action film, except I didn’t have a large gun in my hands... only a toothbrush.
Fortunately, there was no evil man waiting in the shadows to annihilate me. This came as a huge relief and I swore off watching *Luther* on my own and at night. This series should come with a “strictly for daylight hours” warning.
Luther (BBC Entertainment),



the series, not the character (I shall get to him later) drives a kind of terror into me that is as unnerving as it is addictive. I have not missed an episode even though I know it may be the detriment of my mental health. I’m

only now catching up on the third series, which I PVRed early in the year and I have already consulted Wikipedia to see if there is a fourth. There won’t be, at least for now, but I have read reports that suggest a film is in the offing. Fingers crossed, though watching *Luther* in a cinema will be like taking a rollercoaster ride without a safety belt on.
It is not how violence is presented in this series that makes it so terrifying. In most cases we are only exposed to the build-up to the violence and then an encounter with the dead victim as Luther (played by Idris Elba) and his team study her or him. They are mostly victims of twisted serial killers with peculiar patterns, so the body isn’t just violated but is dressed up and

arranged in such a manner that serves as an act of communication that has motivated the murder. Luther is such an experienced detective that in the space of three seconds of viewing these chilling tableaux he knows exactly what makes the killer tick. Bless, he is a clever man.
The sense of fear and suspense is in tracking the killer and observing him (always a man) stalk his victims. The mistake that would-be victims of murder make in movies and TV series is that they are completely unaware of their fate. They ignore all the signs; the broken back door, the footprints on the floor, the dark shadow in the cupboard and most importantly, the taut music in the background that almost always precedes an act of violence. This

is most frustrating for observers because you want the victim to see what you can so that they can escape their death. However, being unaware of what is facing them is perhaps the only blessing; for it is in the anticipation of what will occur that is frightening – hence the viewer is more terrified than the victim.
If you were then to extrapolate some truths about the world from this series, as of course you would (who watches TV with their brains switched off anymore?), you might surmise that fear and terror is not limited to a violent confrontation but the anticipation of it. This isn’t exactly a revelation; much of the anxiety around crime in this country is based on the anticipation of it – living with a panic

button clutched in your hand.
Men and women fear different things. As the author Margaret Atwood observed; “Men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them.” Series like *Luther* either feed this fear or maybe confirm it to be true. Perhaps this is why the series is particularly addictive (for women); it allows you to vicariously play out your worst fear about men. You get to meet the man you fear may be hiding under your bed. Such a scenario plays in your head from when most women are little girls.
Luther is the contemporary knight in shining armour, though he probably only comes to the rescue of women when it is too late. Elba is ideal for this role; he is the kind of tall, dark and hand-

some stranger that makes women go weak at the knees and would be a nightmare to date – he is too busy to keep dates and sometimes the psychos he deals with go after his loved ones.
Atwood’s chilling observation has been quoted frequently of late since that young American Elliot Rodger went on a shooting spree on Isla Vista, Santa Barbara, killing six people before committing suicide, apparently motivated by his hatred of women and their constant rejection of him.
He, or an imagined facsimile, is always lurking somewhere in our psyche. It’s hard to say when women will be released from this – certainly we can’t rely on TV writers and film-makers to help us in this department.