

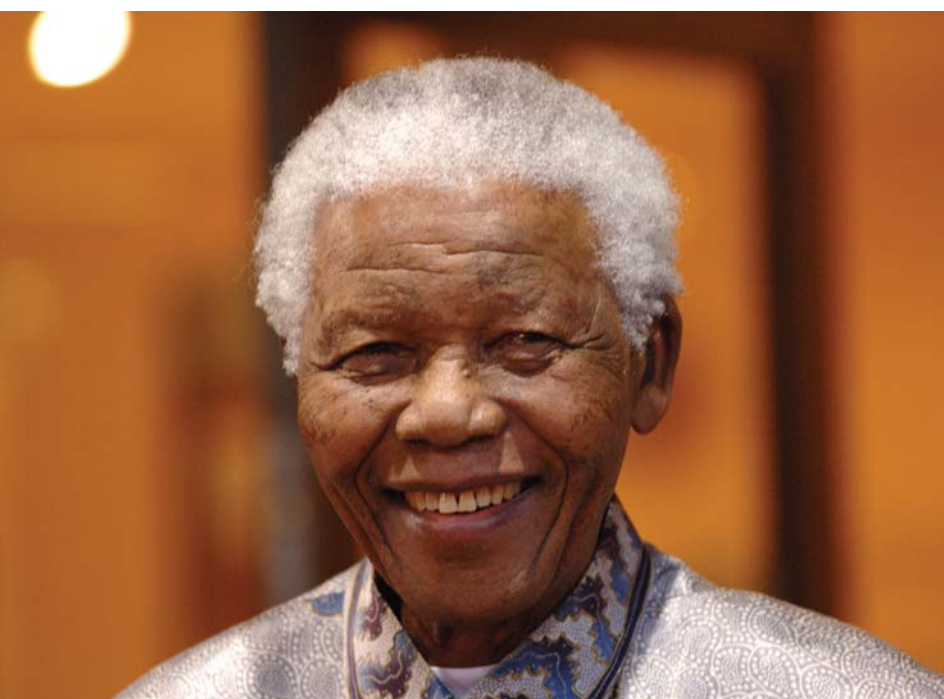
BRAND, AFRICA, BRAND – THE OTHER FACE OF AFRICA

Thebe Ikalafeng | Founder, Brand Leadership

Often misunderstood, mysterious, marginalised, and yet romanticised, Africa – a tapestry of 53 sovereign states that are home to a diverse population of almost one billion people speaking over 1 000 indigenous languages and dialects, their great variety mirrored only in the unrivalled magnificence of the continent’s fauna, flora and natural wealth – hardly registers among the most desirable nation brands, either collectively or as individual nations.

“Brand Africa, with its simple message of ongoing catastrophe, is promoted with skill, dedication and creativity by aid agencies, international organisations, donor governments and, most prominently, by aid celebrities such as Bob Geldof and Bono ... not as 53 countries in various stages of development, struggling for independent existence and identity, but as a uniform, hopeless basket case,” noted global nation branding authority, Simon Anholt, at a recent World Economic Forum in Cape Town, South Africa.

THE ANHOLT-GFK ROPER NATION BRANDS INDEX, WHICH MEASURES THE POWER AND QUALITY OF EACH COUNTRY’S “BRAND IMAGE” AS A FACTOR OF EXPORTS, GOVERNANCE, CULTURE AND HERITAGE, PEOPLE, TOURISM AND INVESTMENT, AND IMMIGRATION, FEATURES ALGERIA, EGYPT, NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA AS THE ONLY AFRICAN NATIONS AMONG THE TOP 50 NATION BRANDS IN THE WORLD



African countries largely absent from Nation Brands Index

It is no surprise then that the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, which measures the power and quality of each country’s “brand image” as a factor of exports, governance, culture and heritage, people, tourism and investment, and immigration, features Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa as the only African nations among the top 50 nation brands in the world. The GMI-Anholt City Brands Index only features Lagos (Nigeria), Johannesburg (South Africa) and Nairobi (Kenya) among the top 60 city brands in the world. Worse still, the 2007 Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer ranks the continent, led by Somalia, as the most corrupt globally.

Someone’s to blame.

"It's the CNN effect," says Professor Charles Soludo, governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Civil wars in Sudan, the DRC and Uganda, Zimbabwe’s freefall, as well as xenophobic and other crime in South Africa, dominate international media coverage of Africa, with scant coverage of the best of the continent.

“WHILE WE CANNOT IGNORE THE REALITIES OF LIFE ON THE CONTINENT, IN ABOLISHING THE OLD, AFRICA MUST PROJECT ITS POSITIVE MESSAGES TO BUILD A STRONG BRAND”

It is indeed time, as Simon Anholt commented, to abolish the old Africa - "Brand Africa" - and proactively showcase the other face of Africa – the best of Africa. “While we cannot ignore the realities of life on the continent, in abolishing the old, Africa must project its positive messages to build a strong brand,” said Lazarus Zim, former chief executive of African global mining giant Anglo American Corporation of SA, at the World Economic Forum’s Africa Economic Summit 2005.

Africa has much to celebrate

An important part of changing the perceptions of Africa centres on changing Africans’ perceptions of their home. Perceptions make a critical difference in how countries are perceived and are a catalyst for vibrant and positive investment, tourism and citizenship – the pillars of strong nation brands.

To compete effectively, according to Anholt, every place needs to be *known* for something: its values, people, ambitions, products, landscapes or even a combination of these.

So, instead of celebrating the Hollywood film *Blood Diamond’s* focus on conflict diamonds, we should be marvelling at South Africa’s De Beers Mining Company’s role in developing and marketing the diamond – the world’s most enduring symbol of endurance, commitment and fidelity and the centre-piece of the British Imperial State Crown.



Kenya's Brimin Kiprop Kipruto celebrates winning gold in the men's 3 000m steeplechase during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

Instead of the images of peace-loving Kenyans displaced and fleeing political violence, imagine the Olympics without Kenya’s splendid steeplechase sportsmen.

Imagine Paul Simon’s multi-Grammy award-winning *Graceland* album without the mellifluous melodies of Ladysmith Black Mambazo or world music without Senegal’s Youssou N’Dour or South Africa’s Miriam Makeba.

Instead of leadership conflicts, dictatorships and coups, conjure up the image of Nelson Mandela, described by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown as “the most inspiring, the greatest and most courageous leader of our generation,” at the unveiling of his towering bronze statue in London’s Parliament Square alongside figures of Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln.

Instead of disconnected and displaced communities, imagine over 80 million Africans all connected by Africa’s entrepreneurial telecommunications networks: Nigeria’s Glo, Sudan’s Celtel and South Africa’s DStv and MTN.

INSTEAD OF LEADERSHIP CONFLICTS, DICTATORSHIPS AND COUPS, CONJURE UP THE IMAGE OF NELSON MANDELA, DESCRIBED BY BRITISH PRIME MINISTER GORDON BROWN AS “THE MOST INSPIRING, THE GREATEST AND MOST COURAGEOUS LEADER OF OUR GENERATION”

Rather than seeing African brands as less valuable, imagine a global first in a country brand valuation: Brand South Africa was valued in 2004 to be worth over \$60 billion by Wits University’s Professor Roger Sinclair, placing it on a par with Interbrand’s 2004 valuation of global commercial brands, IBM (\$53.8 billion) Microsoft (\$61.4 billion) and Coca-Cola (\$67.4 billion).

Imagine a new Africa. Imagine the best of Africa, characterised by resilience, a can-do attitude, entrepreneurial, *ubuntu* (humanness) and creative people. It’s about identifying with and loudly proclaiming the authentic Africa that the world rarely sees.

2010 FIFA World Cup™ – a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change perceptions

Brands are built on perceptions. Countries, cities and regions are brands because people have opinions about them that have become shorthand for our understanding of and relationships with them. Italy is food and fashion. America is power and money. Switzerland is precision. Japan is technology. Germany is engineering. What about Africa?

It’s not too late. Prominent among many initiatives, the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa will provide Africa a global stage with a cumulative television audience over the course of the event expected to top 26 billion. Now is the time – it’s Africa’s turn. The World Cup has the potential to completely change the perceptions of our continent. ►

Up to Africans to rebuild Brand Africa

We just need to believe. A recent BBC’s Voice of the People poll reflects that, “Africans have been feeling good about the direction of their countries and their continent as a whole.” The poll showed that a majority (52%) of Africans are optimistic about the future, thanks to the most encouraging economic indicators in 30 years, and unprecedented peace and prosperity.

Our brands – the people, products, places and experiences – born in Africa, are a platform, a vehicle, to tell our story. “African brands can travel, but it is hard work and we have to be more innovative about how we do it,” said Susan M. Clark, director, corporate affairs at SABMiller, **a South African brewer which, thanks to a number of acquisitions, is today the largest brewer in the world (according to figures released from UK-based researchers Plato Logic in February 2008)*. A deliberate and well-considered brand strategy will enable us to rebuild Africa, one country, one experience and one exposure at a time.

Former South African president Thabo Mbeki famously proposed an “African Renaissance” in a speech in 1998: “Out of Africa reborn must come modern products of human economic activity, significant contribution to the world of knowledge, in the arts, science and technology, new images of an Africa of peace and prosperity.”

Great brands are built on trust. Trust is the outcome of clear and unique country propositions, leadership and consistency in delivering the brands. The more clearly, consistently and uniquely the world sees the best of us, the better Brand Africa will be. It’s up to each one of us. “Africans have to build and sell the African brand themselves,” says Maria Ramos, group chief executive of Africa’s largest state-owned logistics company, Transnet. “If we believe in it, others will believe in it.”

Finally, as Fela Kuti the great Nigerian storyteller summed it up, “I must identify myself with Africa, then I’ll have an identity.”

**Editor’s additions*

THEBE IKALAFENG

Thebe Ikalafeng has been recognised as one of South Africa’s top 10 thinkers in marketing along with former state president, Nelson Mandela and Pick n Pay founder, Raymond Ackerman in a survey by Ipsos Markinor and he was dubbed “Mr Brand” by the *Mail & Guardian*. He is the founder of the 2008 Fin Week Marketing Services Company of the Year, The Brand Leadership Group. A chartered marketer, Thebe graduated *cum laude* with a BSc degree and an MBA from Marquette University in the USA and has been awarded the American Marketing Association/Marquette University Award for Marketing Excellence. Based in Johannesburg, he is a globally sought after speaker, writer and advisor on personal, political, commercial, nation branding and related matters.

ESCALATING AFRICA TO BRAND GREATNESS

Margaret Dingalo | Stakeholder Relations Director, International Marketing Council

Most continents have complicated histories and perhaps none more so than Africa. It is a land of diversity and stark contrasts in term of its customs and people. Yet, it’s the most clearly defined and singular continent in the world in terms of its geography.

For centuries it has triumphed over numerous ideological onslaughts designed to capture the hearts and minds of its people. Consequently it has witnessed the ascent and demise of empires, exalted in the power of religion, toiled under the injustices of slavery and underpinned the expansion of trade between other continents.

For all this, Africa still remains an enigma to many. The tremendous disparity and barriers between its countries make the creation of a single unifying African brand that represents its potential difficult – but also very necessary for its future success.

When one thinks of the continents that span the globe each one has a distinct branding legacy: strong cultural traditions are associated with the East, rich human heritage is the hallmark of Europe, diversity and “a new world” is reflected in North America while South America embodies religious and devotional traditions.

Viewed against this established differentiation of the world, branding Africa is a highly ambitious undertaking. The continent has been portrayed as a dark and foreboding land for such a long time, so much so that perception and reality have merged in the minds of potential investors and visitors.

The global branding firm FutureBrand has for the last three years published a Country Brand Index which identifies the world’s leading countries based on ratings provided by international business and leisure travellers.

It is both insightful and disappointing to see that in many categories African countries languish in the lower percentile of the rankings – indicative of the unfulfilled and unexplored branding potential of these countries.

FutureBrand is succinct in its advice to countries that seek to improve their brand: it must not be just a creative expression

but a promise of value. Africa’s brand must therefore reflect our business goals, our economic objectives and long-term vision for sustainable development.

Africa’s brand must be built on a platform that can speak convincingly to all the constituents that it seeks to influence, in addition to aligning and mediating between the many competing interests on the continent.

Brand Africa needs to become what Martin Lindstrom, author of *BRAND sense*, refers to as a “Holistic Selling Proposition”. This, in his opinion, is a brand that recognises the interconnectedness of all the elements that make up the brand.

Every communication this brand sends out, through every channel, is related to the brand’s core philosophy. Every African country will therefore become a vital player in creating a holistic Brand Africa.

PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHERE OPPRESSION IS UNFAIRLY BEING INFLICTED UPON A NATION, ALL OF AFRICA NEEDS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE RUINOUS IMPACT IT HAS NOT ONLY ON THE LIVES OF PEOPLE, BUT ALSO UPON THE POTENTIAL OF BRAND AFRICA

Changing the image of Africa and establishing a leading continental brand will therefore require each African country to address its own image. This means that where perception gaps exist around graft, the legitimacy of governments, social injustice and the abuse of power; these perceptions are remedied by the power of positive branding messages.

Perhaps more importantly, where oppression is unfairly being inflicted upon a nation, all of Africa needs to acknowledge the ruinous impact it has not only on the lives of people, but also upon the potential of Brand Africa.

We are currently on the cusp of a period of economic and social growth that can go a long way towards establishing a brand identity for the continent. One that promotes foreign investment, instils pride in the continent, supports enterprise and recognises Africans as worthy global citizens.

The reality is that this brand will have to be fostered and nurtured by all Africans, irrespective of their status in society, their level of education and the daily endeavours they are involved with.

It also demands a generational commitment because the deeply ingrained misconceptions and poor image that Africa has will not be broken down overnight. It will require a concerted effort for

all Africans to escape a mindset that diminishes Africa’s worth and condemns it to secondary status on the world stage.

Therefore, before we can direct Brand Africa at foreign markets and decision makers, it is important to create respect amongst Africa’s people for each other and harness the wealth of opportunity that exists in our diversity.

Our continent’s character, its traditions and its natural resources are all strong enough to create a buoyant brand. Our continent is unique, it is not interchangeable and most certainly not substitutable – it is distinct and as a brand has the benefit of not making any clichéd claims. *Africa – The Good News* serves as a starting point in escalating Africa to brand greatness.

MARGARET DINGALO

Margaret Dingalo is stakeholder relations director for the International Marketing Council of South Africa. Margaret has +-14 years experience in the marketing and communications field gained in various industries including the transport, automotive, infrastructure and services sector. She is a graduate of the University of the North (Limpopo) and Hull University (UK) and holds qualifications in strategic marketing communications, port operations management and international business management.

