

African creators need to invest in building brands

South African-born leading marketer Thebeetalle Ikalafeng is in Uganda conducting a series of workshops. Fredrick Masiga sounded him out on a variety of issues. Excerpt:

Why is it important to brand, business, product or even persons?

A brand is a promise made and promise to be kept. It's about identity, it's about distinction. In today's multimedia, multi-competitor, multi-options and just too much plain clutter, the brand is a short hand for what differentiates your business or self.

How can African brands penetrate competitive Western or Asian markets?

African creators need to invest in building brands. Among the world's top 100 brands, 80/100 are American and a couple are Japanese, Indian, Chinese, Swedish, etc. No African brands. We are more consumers rather than creators. But most importantly we lack confidence in our ability to build and support "made in Africa."

We need to create a unique offering and distinction of what "Made in Africa" means. "Made in Germany" means engineering excellence. "Made in Japan" means precision. "Made in China" means mass and inexpensive. What does "Made in Africa" mean?

If we can believe in Africa and what makes us different, others will believe in it and all it's about. Brands are the vehicle to tell a new African story. That's why MTN (South Africa) and Glo (Nigeria) are such important success stories - they speak to the African spirit of entrepreneurship, confidence and resilience.

How can indigenous businesses overcome the challenge of poor customer care?

Most indigenous businesses do not understand that the consumer gives them a license to operate and exist. The first thing we need to do is to introduce metrics which show the correlation of service excellence to the bottom line. Think restaurants - particularly those that pay a combination of basic plus tips. The only way to get better remuneration is to offer excellent service, and vice versa. The brand and service excellence is that premium beyond normal service delivery.

The roles of the CEO and the marketing manager are getting less different; how can the two continue to co-exist without the other swallowing one?

The CEO is the chief brand custodian, the embodiment of the brand - the signal of what to expect inside the organisation. A survey by Buckram Marsteller Hill UK established that based on reputation of the CEO, 98 per cent decide whether to invest in a company, 94 per cent will believe in a company under pressure from the media, 98 per cent would recommend a company as a good partner, 98 per cent maintain confidence when share price lags, 88 per cent recommend the company as a good place to work. Such a CEO in an organisation is godsend. If you have a marketing/brand oriented CEO on the board, you'll have a winning brand team. The marketing manager's role is to be the architect of the brand. Not necessarily the face of it. The CEO, like a president of a country, gives the vision and set the tone, and the rest, marketing management included, put the plan in place.

How can countries like Uganda sell themselves to the rest of the world successfully without throwing away billions of dollars on advertising/marketing?

Nation branding follows the same principles of mar-

keting. It's about building a proposition that resonates with citizens, investors and visitors. Similarly, such a proposition has to be built on a foundation of a clear and differentiated strategy, consistent delivery and underpinning products and services as platforms for delivering the brand. Find the unique selling proposition - you cannot be all things to everybody. If India is about IT, Kenya about Safari, what

is Uganda's proposition?

What national/corporate branding lessons can be taken from the current global financial situation for similar future global catastrophes?

In tough times, brands have to invest in the fundamentals - clarity, differentiation and consistent delivery. Ideally, a country's portfolio of investment should include those assets and instruments that

are unique to the country, and therefore unconnected to the global economy as well as those that are - albeit as difficult as it seems. With Africa in general depended for a large extent on the "generosity" of the world, our fortunes are often tied together.

Who is Thebeetalle Ikalafeng?

Born and raised in Kimberly, South Africa. Thebeetalle Ikalafeng earned BSc (Comm

laude) and MBA at Marquette University in Milwaukee, USA. He started marketing career at Colgate Palmolive, USA and then South Africa, Sun International. Prior to a distinguished six-year career as marketing director of Nike South Africa then Africa where he led the organisation to marketing organisation of the year, 450 per cent growth, and the globally sought after Cannes Lions for advertising excellence 10 times.



Respect is an integral attribute to our value system. Over the years respect has been towards those companies which have outperformed their competitors in strong leadership, business growth and innovation. Earning the respect of the region's business leaders is no small feather in the cap for the management.

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