

## **BRAND LEADERSHIP and TWO TONE DESIGN**

### **The new kids on the block**

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#### **Blue chips and black talent**

Specialist brand strategy consultancy Brand Leadership and design agency Two Tone Design may be relatively new - in terms of the years in the market as independent firms, the size of the firms and the relative youth of their teams - but they are not wet behind the ears.

The partners' collective experience, the number of blue chip clients who have enlisted the firms to lead their brands and the calibre of work coming out of this partnership shows that this is a successful partnership.

Graphic designer Carlo Murison, who has worked for a number of leading agencies, established Two Tone in 2001.

In 2002, Thebe Ikalafeng, former marketing director for Africa for Nike, who joined Two Tone Design as strategy director and shareholder, established Brand Leadership, a brand strategy consultancy.

The partners of Brand Leadership bring together a wealth of experience.

The firm is led by Ikalafeng in strategy, Professor Roger Sinclair in international brand valuation, Murison in visual identity and design, intellectual property attorney Hans Muhlberg and consumer insights expert Rebecca Roderick. It introduced an African first - a new model brand consultancy that integrates law, strategy and design.

"It is an ideal partnership and together we're able to take on a number of projects jointly or separately, but at all times retain the ability to offer clients of various magnitudes an integrated brand leadership proposition unmatched in the market," says Ikalafeng.

"We are truly SA companies," says Murison. "Our equity ownership, which is at least 80% black in each company, and staff representation, which covers all races and creeds, is the benchmark for empowerment and reflects the market we serve. We are South African in every sense of the word."

Murison says that when he started Two Tone Design, his initial idea was to keep the agency black. "As a young black designer, I know just how hard it is to be recognised in the advertising industry, and how badly many young black designers are exploited," he says.

"I wanted Two Tone to be an agency where black designers could make a name for themselves and be recognised for their efforts."

Murison laments the shortage of black designers.

"There is a serious shortage of black talent, particularly black female designers. And we want to be the agency that leads the change in that area."

Though the companies are essentially black, they do not sell themselves as such.

"We just happen to be a bunch of mostly black people, with blue chip experience. And that's what we sell - solid blue chip skills, not black insights," says Ikalafeng. "Black insights are just one of our many offerings."

Ikalafeng recalls the first potential client who approached them, but was interested only in getting "emerging market" skills from them, and reserved the more strategic "brand consultancy" for a competitor, a more established, all-white firm.

"On principle, and to safeguard our integrity, we were happy to walk away from the client who obviously saw us merely as a bunch of black, ex-township guys, whose only value could be that of black skills," says Ikalafeng.

Surprisingly, given the fact that the average age at Two Tone Design is about 28, the agency has a family-orientated value system. "We're not a typical advertising or design agency at all. None of us gets drunk or high. I have old-fashioned values and that has been instilled in the agency," says Murison. "The result is that our staff are responsible citizens of both the marketing and broader SA society. They are all accountable individuals, talented in their particular area of expertise."

Two Tone Design has offices in Johannesburg and Bloemfontein and a staff complement of 30.

The energy levels at both Two Tone Design and Brand Leadership are high. This is represented most obviously by Ikalafeng, whose high-octane presence dominates any gathering.

An industrial psychologist who recently interviewed every employee within the organisation was surprised to discover that 99% of the staff were fully committed to the company.

"There is an incredible spirit at Two Tone," says Ikalafeng. "This place is like a beehive. It doesn't stop buzzing until late at night."

Brand Leadership and Two Tone Design have both had baptisms of fire in the past two years. They have pitched against most of the larger design agencies and consultancies, and come out on top on a number of occasions.

The partnership is working on what could arguably be called SA's two biggest visual assets. In November 2003, Two Tone Design was appointed the lead global design agency to handle the SA Tourism account.

Earlier that year, Brand Leadership was appointed to craft strategic guidelines for the brand architecture, intellectual property management and consolidation strategy for SA's coat of arms and Two Tone Design was tasked with creating the visual language and corporate identity manual.

"It certainly is overwhelming, and gratifying, to know that for the foreseeable future, our companies will play a critical role in creating the images that South Africans and tourists will identify as South African," says Ikalafeng.

Demonstrating the skills found in the two companies, Sinclair was asked by the International Marketing Council (IMC) to determine the brand value of brand SA.

The assignments show that Brand Leadership and Two Tone Design need not

worry about being positioned as offering only black insights.

They have established themselves as blue chip brand companies, advising brand owners at leading organisations on how to develop and implement differentiated strategies that create growth and build long-term relationships with consumers.

This year the partnership has been handling high level accounts and advising blue chip companies such as African Oxygen Limited, Telecom Namibia, Apple, Media 24, Peoples Bank, End-To-End Solutions, V&A Waterfront and Standard Bank on group strategic level.

"We have been fortunate in that we have not worked on scraps of business but have been awarded really interesting blue-chip work," says Ikalafeng.

"We have worked in most sectors, including finance, energy, media, telecoms, music, tourism and information technology," says Murison.

"But we are just getting started."

What's the secret of their success and their meteoric rise?

"We are learning organisations. We never want to stop learning because when we do, it will spell the end for us," says Ikalafeng.

"The world and our environment is continually evolving, and we want to be at the cutting edge, partnering our clients to create an enduring future for their brands."

"We are small firms, but are more strategically focused than most," says Murison.

"With Sinclair, Sen Mdluli, Rob Campbell, Roderick and Ikalafeng, we have some of the country's most experienced strategists on board to ensure that all our work is grounded on solid strategy."

Ikalafeng says: " We are passionate about our crafts, committed to delivering high-quality, lasting solutions to our clients and building benchmark organisations in touch with the new, global SA."