

## SA's BRAND HEROES - A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL

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Armed with a mandate from almost two-thirds of South Africans eligible to vote, the ANC embarked on a mission to reposition and relaunch brand SA, with a clear value proposition - a better life for all.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of our democracy and a decade of building brands - public and private.

Taking a commercial, or brand, perspective, are we on track for a better life for all? And what have the country's two globally recognised brand custodians - Nobel laureate and former president Nelson Mandela and President Thabo Mbeki - government departments, foreign missions and initiatives such as SA Tourism, the International Marketing Council and Proudly South African accomplished?

There are several ways we can measure their impact on brand SA. First, SA's leadership on a variety of political, social and economic issues, under Mandela and Mbeki, is globally recognised. Mandela's stature as one of the top five most recognisable brands in the world - keeping company with Coca-Cola - and Mbeki's status as the inaugural African Union leader and architect of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) underscores the strength of our country's leadership.

Second, the listings of BHP Billiton, SABMiller, Dimension Data, Old Mutual and Investec on the London Stock Exchange, the Nobel prize for literature for J M Coetzee, the peace prizes for Mandela and former president F W de Klerk, Mark Shuttleworth's space mission and the successful introduction of many of the world's most valuable brands to our shores has enhanced the value, viability and allure of brand SA.

And third, the need for brand custodians to be accountable means that brand valuation has become a way to evaluate the return on investment.

In a world first, Wits University's Professor Roger Sinclair established the value of brand SA to be US\$50bn, ranking it fourth on Interbrand's list of the world's most valuable brands - after Coca-Cola, Microsoft and IBM.

Under the leadership of Cheryl Carolus at SA Tourism and Yvonne Johnston at the International Marketing Council, SA continues to attract international tourists.

Marty Neumeier, the author of *Brand Gap*, says: "A brand is not what you say it is, it is what they [consumers] say it is." At least 70% of the respondents to a global study by the UK's Henley Centre said "if they trust a brand, they'll recommend it to others". The benefits SA has reaped in terms of tourism and the GDP show that brand SA is a valuable economic proposition.

Though SA faces many challenges in terms of housing, safety, jobs and education, the country is a better place than it was 10 years ago. At least 70% of homes have access to fresh water and electricity and at least 70% of matriculants passed their exams. Though the country's unemployment hovers between 30% and 40%, more professionals across all races have access to the employment of their choice.

The new SA, according to advertising luminary Reg Lascaris in his assessment of our country's brand, "is immeasurably better than the old - a participative democracy where no-one tells anyone who they can marry, where they can live and what jobs they can do". And it is a brand, which is why our president engaged one of the world's largest brand companies, Unilever, to partner the International Marketing Council and SA Tourism to define, craft and refine the country's value proposition.

Almost all of the top 25 agencies can now boast empowerment credentials. Beyond the political and social concerns, transformation is a business imperative.

There is "a better life for all" - a better brand of which to be proud. Proudly South African.

- *Ikalafeng is the chairman of the FM AdFocus Conference 2004.*