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CEO'S REPORT ENSURING THE TEAM MAKES ALL THE RIGHT MOVES



A time of reflection, renewal and preparedness

This is a time of renewal. South Africa remains, as ever, Alive with Possibility because that is our DNA. Yet halfway through its second decade, our young Nation continues to face an array of daunting domestic challenges compounded by a profound global recession. How we deal with, and learn from, these challenges will determine whether, and how high, we are ranked among the world's most successful and competitive nations.

South Africa was called the miracle nation after the first democratic election in 1994, because the world thought that the impossible had been achieved. In fact, what was achieved were the very things that make South Africa Alive with Possibility. With courage, patience, creativity and a large helping of ubuntu, South Africa was reinvented and repositioned.

But the task of building the reputation of South Africa as a Nation Brand is far from done yet. Renewal and reinvention must continue to be our watchwords at the International Marketing Council, having been tasked with piloting South Africa to become one of the world's most admired and competitive nations.

Our efforts are very much centred around 2010 as a successful hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ will prove a powerful launch pad for the next phase of national growth. It is critical that in the run-up to the world's largest sporting event we have covered all the bases.

The starting point has to be a careful and considered stock-take and developing sound foundations on which the roll-out to 2010 can be grounded. Much of the 2008/2009 financial year was devoted to this process, with the findings of the IMC's Strategic Review providing the framework. The Review's key recommendations, once implemented by the Board and the executive team, will result in an organisation that is better positioned, more focused and optimally equipped to build and manage the reputation of South Africa's Nation Brand.

Public-private partnerships

The Strategic Review confirmed that the IMC must continue to be an independent organisation within a public-private partnership, but that a refined mandate needs to be developed that will highlight new ways of implementing the brand strategy and making an impact on strategic and business planning. One measure already implemented has led to the integration of the Communications Resource Centre into the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS). The unit will retain its media intelligence function and will continue to provide critical input to South Africa's reputation and brand management initiatives.

Capitalising on 2010

The 2010 FIFA World Cup™ offers an unrivalled opportunity to remind the world of South Africa's Brand DNA and why the country deserves to be ranked as a world-class destination for investment and travel as well as a source of quality products, new ideas and inspiration. The IMC's efforts over the reporting period were therefore focused on building the launch-pad that successfully hosting 2010 presents.

In January 2009 the IMC showcased the country's preparations and readiness at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Similarly, the high turnout at the media event at the Beijing Olympics in August 2008 was testament to the enormous excitement the first Africa-hosted World Cup is generating. The IMC and the FIFA Organising Committee, represented by its Chairman Danny Jordaan, also participated in campaigns to raise awareness of 2010 in the UK and other European Union nations.

Closer to home, the IMC co-hosted the third 2010 National Communications Conference, which has a vital role to play in ensuring stakeholder alignment so that the World Cup enhances South Africa's reputation to the fullest possible extent.

Mobilising the nation's team spirit

A country without self-belief will have trouble convincing others to believe in it. If South Africans don't believe they can overcome tough obstacles and compete with the best, we are going to have a hard time convincing the rest of the world. South Africa's selection as host of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ was an enormous boost to the national psyche. High morale and a strong brand go hand-in-hand. Unfortunately, some of the events at home (load-shedding, xenophobia, political instability) and abroad (global economic recession) have combined to sap some of the confidence over the review period.

The IMC is working to rebuild a resilient and tenacious "Team South Africa" spirit as the World Cup kick-off in June 2010 approaches. The goal: to ensure South Africans are passionate about the World Cup whatever the fortunes of Bafana Bafana on the field! (Although South Africa's subsequent performance in the successful Confederation Cup would seem to suggest an improvement in outlook.)

Ultimately, if South Africa delivers a memorable World Class in a unique and memorable style, the country and the continent will be the winners. This proposition has only one major caveat: that everyone in this country plays their part.

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The IMC believes it can help empower South Africans in fulfilling their vital role in the run-up to and during the 2010 tournament. With this in mind the IMC helped to launch an Active Citizenship campaign working initially as a lead partner in the Movement for Good. Under the slogan “It starts with you” the intention is to inspire South Africans to play an active role in creating the kind of country they want to live in.

In the engagement phase of the campaign, members of the public were encouraged to describe - via telephone, text messages or the Internet - the South Africa of their hopes and dreams. In the second phase their messages, and with it the issues they raised, were publicised by a range of mass media organisations. What remains to be done over the next few months is to use the public’s responses and create an inspirational and empowering campaign depicting “the country we want to live in”.



Aligning Brand South Africa

Becoming one of the world’s most admired Nation Brands requires painstaking attention to issues of “positioning”, value proposition and the visual language used to express these. To have the strongest possible global impact all stakeholders representing South Africa

need to be aligned intellectually, philosophically and literally around the Nation Brand’s corporate identity. A major focus of the IMC’s work over the past year has been to deepen our partnerships with public sector organisations such as SA Tourism and the Department of Trade and Industry. These are the organisations that present South Africa to the world and it is critical that they are involved in developing communication tools that deliver the brand message in a consistent, coherent and brand-enhancing manner. As a part of the evolving brand alignment framework, Brand South Africa is finalising a fresh, new logo (based on the principle of

the National Flag) at the centre of the visual language to be used by all the Nation Brand partners. The IMC is also developing a password-protected web portal that houses the tools needed for the South African brand building community to “sing from the same song sheet”.

Putting the International in the International Marketing Council

The Brand South Africa story is a varied and often paradoxical one, told differently in different forums. There is the story that we tell to ourselves - hence the focus on domestic morale and team-building. There is the story we narrate to the world. But there is also the story the world tells itself about South Africa. A big part of the IMC’s job is to ensure that these stories, whatever the forum, are positive, persuasive and consistent.

To help achieve this the IMC pursues a Country Management strategy that is orchestrated in SA but delivered by country managers in London and Washington, through key stakeholders as well as by hosting foreign officials and journalists. The strategy seeks to align the South African story with what the world (at least the most influential parts of it) tells itself about the country.

Managing the reputation of South Africa has faced a number of challenges over the reporting period. Political transition, power outages, xenophobia, healthcare issues and criticism of South Africa’s foreign policy have called upon the depth of the IMC’s experienced staff, most noticeably the country managers. An initiative that has truly gained traction over the past year has been the Global South Africans (GSA) project, which identifies and then leverages a network of influential and well-placed South Africans living abroad. They remain committed to the success of South Africa and the strengthening of its brand. The GSA is a powerful counterweight to the negativity expressed by a small group of disenchanted expatriates.

Members of the network are becoming an increasingly important resource for the South African brand building community. Not only do they narrate the South African story, they offer strategic advice, encourage investment and facilitate Nation branding events in their respective communities.

Winning in a content-driven media world

The global media landscape has changed fundamentally and unrecognisably over the past few years: anyone with access to the internet is a publisher with the potential to have their “content” - words, pictures, videos, sounds - reach an audience dwarfing that of a major television network, let alone the print readership of esteemed newspapers such as the New York Times.

Over the past year the IMC has made substantial steps in implementing a digital media strategy so that the country is a leader in harnessing the powers of new media as a nation branding tool. In December 2008 the IMC hosted a pioneering tour of leading US bloggers. They subsequently posted hundreds of brand-building items on the Internet which were viewed, commented on and linked to all over the world.

The web is becoming an increasingly prominent weapon in the IMC’s arsenal of media tools. BrandSouthAfricaBlog.com was launched last year to capture and amplify the positive messages about South Africa by independent voices on the web. As significant was the launch in May 2008 of a web-based media service, MediaClubSouthAfrica.com. This website contains regularly updated stories and photographs, which are increasingly being sought by traditional media while at the same time attracting links from major websites.

Conclusion

Whatever else Brand South Africa may be, it’s never static. It is as dynamic and energetic as the fast-evolving young nation which it encapsulates. As its reputation and Brand custodian, the IMC has to be as dynamic and energetic. But it also requires the agility to adapt to new environments and deal with change.

It is incumbent upon us to recognise that the Nation’s brand ultimately must reside in all the people of this country. Every South African has a hand in shaping it. The task of the IMC is to inspire

and empower all of its citizens to participate in what is effectively a voluntary brand franchise – one that is truly Alive with Possibility.

Subsequent to the end of the reporting year, the country has yet again demonstrated its abilities through hosting a number of global events (IPL Cricket, Lions Tour and the Confederation Cup). Crucially it staged a peaceful and participatory election which has given rise to a fresh and dynamic leadership team, exactly what is needed as we move towards the most significant “moment of truth” since 1994.

The year ahead is a critical one. The IMC needs to finalise its preparations and ready the nation to take optimal advantage of this defining milestone – the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ in June and July 2010, which will determine how South Africa is viewed, perceived and positioned for years to come. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to showcase the country to the world and as such needs to be viewed as the springboard to the future. Much of the preparatory groundwork has been completed in the past year. Between now and June 2010 the IMC will go all out to foster a shared understanding of the Brand at home and a deeper appreciation of the South African story abroad.

Team IMC, our partners and stakeholders will undertake this great responsibility in the knowledge that there can be few greater honours than to serve one’s country to the best of one’s ability.

Paul Bannister
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