

City that rocks - Branding through events

 By [Mfundo Ntsibande](#)

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City branding or country marketing is not a new phenomenon. Post World War II it was imperative that countries particularly cities, rebuild themselves and use marketing strategies to enhance and promote the better image of the country or cities for reasons such as attracting tourism, attracting business, talent and resources.

As far as event hosting is concerned there are two basic reasons:

- The first is that local authorities deal with mega-events in strategic terms, pursuing opportunities for regional, national and international promotion at low cost, eg: Olympics Games, media spin off
- Event hosting can boost tourism development, for cities that seek to be competitive, eg; Barcelona's international profile of the city was shaped during the hosting of the Olympics of 1992

When you think of Brazil, what naturally comes to mind is "The Carnival" in Rio the capital city. The event is well marketed in that it attracts foreign travellers wanting to experience culture and the vibe of the city.



Event properties

Cities around the world have invested in 'event properties' to drive marketing and tourism. In the book 'Branding New York - How a city in crisis was sold to the world', branding transformed New York's image from that of a "gritty working-class city" to "one that is business- and tourist-friendly"

So why is city branding such a big deal in South Africa these days? Multi million rand budgets are spent by municipalities on their rebranding or repositioning every year.

The main reasons for which a marketing strategy (city branding) takes place are as follows: (Karmowska, 2002)

- Attract tourism
- To attract investment
- Develop industry and entrepreneurship
- To attract new residents
- To influence local society - internal marketing

Most South Africans have never been to New York but due to movies, music and media we all know about the famous "I LOVE NEW YORK" logo. Jay Z put it simple "In New York, Concrete jungle where dreams are made of". Through branded caps, music, Broadway, fashion, arts, culture and the famous - hot dog. New York is a well marketed city with tourism driven by culture, real estate, events, business and people.

Bringing it back home, it has become a marketing strategy to align the city with an event property that will boost the tourism industry, drive brand positioning and create awareness.

Cape Town - The city that works for you

Cape Town a perfect holiday's destination, the Monaco of Africa. Cape Town is the ultimate luxury and the Rolls Royce of city living. The J&B Met is all about glamour, networking, fashion, sophistication and "partying" with friends. Central to the afternoon's entertainment the lawns of the Kenilworth Racecourse are transformed into a tapestry of colour and fashion.

This event property attracts a much higher LSM (8-10) and positions the city as a high end brand, it's an inspirational event property that gives the feeling of "I have made it in life". It takes place annually in February and boosts tourism and the economy during a generally low season after the high peak festive season. Sponsors get a huge ROI on the publicity as the event competes with no other in that particular time.

Joburg - A world class African city

Everything that happens in South Africa starts from Johannesburg. With so many event properties for all target markets, you are literally spoilt for choice.

From The BMW polo, Delicious Food & Music Festival and the Joy of Jazz, the city is not short of event properties.

Although it's difficult to pinpoint one particular signature event property that Joburg uses to position itself, Joburg's brand differentiator is in its entertainment value, international concerts are firstly staged in Joburg than everywhere else. Events like Africa Fashion Week, International Motor show are some that justifies the world class positioning.

Durban - The warmest place to be

There are songs about Durban (Mawufuna Uku Groova Woza e Durban), branded T-shirts and slogans "Durban Rocks", this was from the street culture not a formal marketing campaign. The social life of Durban wasn't much to write home about until 10 years ago. The Durban July played a big role in positioning the city as more than a holiday destination but also fun, entertainment, fashion, arts and music destination of Africa. Popularly known as the Vodacom Durban July, it sneaks up on you and spreads like wildfire to soon engulf the entire country.



The event attracts people from all walks of life from LSM 4-10, and is accessible to the general public. The success of the event is bringing together corporate South Africa and having a huge endorsement from the fashion, music industry, media platforms, hospitality and government.

The interesting fact that majority of the 55,000 people that attend the event care less about the actual horse race but the attendance grows year on year, Durban the Miami of Africa. The success of the Durban city brand is in its easy accessibility, friendly and fun personality

Building a brand

So it is quite evident that you cannot separate the city and the province, the sub brand and mother brand theory. Smaller provinces have an opportunity of rebranding and positioning based on their unique attributes. Event branding will always be a success if done right.

Bloemfontein has the Macufe event and is also big in soccer (Celtics) and rugby, and has received a lot of mileage from the ANC conference in Mangaung. There is an opportunity to create a unique brand proposition using sports and events as a marketing tool.

Sponsors are prepared to invest in event properties that have long term strategy and are able to yield huge ROI. It takes more than five years to build a successful, reputable event brand.

Therefore, cities like Polokwane, Port Elizabeth, Nelspruit and Mafikeng have a huge opportunity to use strategic events in branding the city, unique attributes like diverse culture, youth vibrancy, tourist attractions, as well as landscape and people can be used to formulate a brilliant marketing strategy by creating unique event properties.

The idea is to stand out, be different and be daring, successful event property can enhance brand positioning and leverage a healthy brand image = return on investment on tourism.

ABOUT MFUNDO NTSIBANDE

Mfundo Ntsibande is marketing professional with over 16 years career of building brands, with a maverick approach to brand thinking. A thought- leader with a background in media and broadcasting (TV, Radio, Print), Advertising and entrepreneurship. A winner of Promaxbda Gold Award.

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