

Branding in the USA



Recently the International Marketing Council of South Africa (IMC) and the United States Commercial Services (USCS) embarked on an unprecedented mission to three cities in the United States of America, with the primary aim of successfully marketing South Africa to the world's largest economy and South Africa's biggest trading partner.

The Branding, Trade and Investment Mission to the US, which took place from 11-19 June 2004, was unique in that the IMC's primary objective was to positively position and promote the South African brand, thereby creating a more receptive environment for the secondary objective of direct trade, investment and tourism promotion.

The branding objective was achieved by showcasing the strength and sustainability of the South African success story. To best demonstrate the South African success story from a business perspective, 42 high level "brand ambassadors" from business and government were invited to engage with the US media and stakeholders, to tell their own stories and share their views on the future of South Africa.

Commenting on the mission, Yvonne Johnston, CEO of the IMC said: "Our international perception surveys and research, conducted over the past 3 years, have shown us that, as our country's brand gains value and acceptance internationally, the international community is starting to accept that our political stability is sustainable and that our political leadership has got significant depth. Research also shows that there is not the same perception of, and level of comfort in, our business and economic leadership. It was the intention of this mission to address this gap."

The South African delegation, led by IMC Chairperson, Wendy Luhabe, included some of the country's leading business personalities. A number of emerging entrepreneurs, whose participation was sponsored by established business leaders, also joined the delegation. Apart from showcasing successes across various levels and sectors of South African business and industries, this key partnership also demonstrated the existing, but underutilised, synergies between South Africa's established and emerging enterprises in the drive to find new markets for South African products and services.

The 'brand ambassadors' met with New York Congressman Charles B. Rangel, Illinois Senator Carol Moseley Braun, Atlanta Mayor Franklin and Oprah Winfrey, who praised the South Africans for their achievements in the development of South Africa's political and economic arena. In addition, the South African delegation interacted with a number of US politicians, business executives and senior media practitioners embracing the mission. All meetings with the corporate, public, academic and media players touched on themes such as political, economic and social transformation in South Africa; black economic empowerment and the opportunities in trade, investment and tourism.

The highlights of this inaugural venture included a series of investment conferences in each city, the New York Stock Exchange hosting a South Africa Week during the delegation's presence in the US, the signing of a memorandum of understanding between NAFCOC and the Global Trade and Technology Center in Harlem, New York and a cruise aboard Spirit of New York on the Hudson River. The mission finale featured a concert by the Atlanta Pops Orchestra celebrating South Africa's freedom and democracy.

The intensive "three cities in one week" mission engaged close to 2500 US business decision makers, who gained a better understanding of South Africa and the fact that it is truly a country alive with possibilities. The mission put into perspective the transformational path that the country is taking in addressing some of the legacies of apartheid and built confidence in the country's significant socio-economic growth and development and the progress achieved by South Africa during its first decade of freedom.

Overall, the mission amply demonstrated what can be achieved when government, business and other key stakeholders collectively work towards positioning the country favourably, to enhance its competitiveness to attract more investments and to increase its share of global trade and tourism. It was a collective response to the call to action made by the IMC that "Marketing South Africa is everybody's business!"

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