

Celebrating 20 years of living in Levi's locally

By  Ilse van den Berg

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How better to celebrate 20 years of building a legendary brand in South Africa than transforming an old Cape Town factory/warehouse into a San Francisco streetscape, taking guests way-back-when to the very beginning of the Levi's brand in 1853?

Add to this some fabulous food, drinks, sounds from MacStanley (formerly known as Flat Stanley) and my personal fave, Jeremy Loops, some good lookin' guests (most, if not all, strutting their own pairs of Levi's for the special event), and you have yourself one helluva of a party... and a whole lot of denim.



The 20-year celebration coincided with the company's [global advertising campaign, Live in Levi's®](#) being launched in South Africa.

Upon arrival, guests received a 'Legacy Street' passport and map, and were encouraged to walk around 'Legacy Street', pop in at every 'shop' to get their passport stamped, learn more and experience the brand and its history, and stand the chance of winning one of five customised 501 Trucker Jackets.



Levi Strauss & Co. is also granting more than R5m to South African causes, including some of the company's long-standing partners such as the Nelson Mandela Foundation, AIDS Legal Network (ALN) and Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), as well as two new pioneering organisations, Greenpop and 18twenty8. It has also developed initiatives, such as 'Red for Life', which educates people infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS. And just last month, it brought South Africans the 'Pioneer Nation' festival, with the goal of making entrepreneurs out of young South Africans.

Twenty years ago, the company was encouraged by the political and economic environment to create employment opportunities for local South Africans. When the Levi Strauss facility in Epping was established, the majority of its employees were unemployed and without industry experience. Today, the company employs more than 550 staff and workers and has 45 Levi's stores in sub-Saharan Africa. The Hearts & Hands Gallery - an exhibition by Morne van Zyl - was a visual tribute at the event to the 16 staff members who have been part of the Levi's South Africa team since day one.





[click to enlarge](#)

Since Levi's President and CEO, Chip Bergh was in town for the big celebration, I asked him a few questions about the [Live in Levi's campaign](#), building a brand and marketing in South Africa, as well as the [Pioneer Nation festival](#)...

■ ***What has been the response from the public and what was the effect on the brand since the 'Live in Levi's' campaign launched?***

Chip Bergh: Live in Levi's is based on a deep consumer insight about the fact that consumers wear other jeans but they *live* in Levi's. It is based on the storytelling of consumers about the things they have done in their Levi's.



Chip Bergh

The advertisement went on air around the world in late July/early August and the reaction overall was very positive. Part of what we tried to do was reconnect the brand back with its soul. The brand is truly a democratic one on a global basis and this is portrayed in the advertising which features everyone from small little children through to a grandfather and everything in between. The reaction to this has been overwhelmingly positive.

From a business result, we are seeing some good momentum behind it and are encouraged by the response.

Here in South Africa, consistent with what we have seen around the world, we are seeing a really good response to the

advertising and an uptick in business in our stores and with our customers, so we feel generally very bullish about it. We believe that the insight is real and our plans are to continue with this advertising idea for an extended period of time.

■ ***After 20 years' successful business in South Africa, what have you learnt about marketing in the retail industry in South Africa?***

Bergh: We have learnt that South Africa is not too dissimilar to all other countries. South Africans appreciate quality products, backed by a responsible and sustainable business.

■ ***What advice do you have for someone trying to build a quality, legendary brand such as Levi's in South Africa?***

Bergh: You need perseverance, tenacity, great values to guide you, and you need to keep on innovating.

In our case, we wouldn't have been able to stick around for over 160 years if we didn't have the perseverance and the tenacity that is inherent in the company's DNA. We are a company that always tries to do the harder right rather than the easier wrong.

We are guided by our values and doing the right thing. We manage the business for the long-term - recognising that we are going to hit bumps along the way and staying committed to it for the long-term. We have done that and done it successfully. Over time we have built a meaningful, sizeable business in South Africa as well as in both India and China where we have, over a decade, become the number one brand. We have a strong leadership position and a strong foundation.

We have been constantly innovating to make our most loved products even better. What we have discovered is that it is the brand itself - including our products and the way we treat people and the environment - that attracts consumers.

■ ***Elaborate a bit on the 'Pioneer Nation' element of the campaign...***

Bergh: We are recognising young entrepreneurs and giving them a platform from which to share their stories and inspire those with similar aspirations to fulfil their dreams.

Pioneer Nation is designed to be a pragmatic resource for the young and eager looking to connect the dots from insight to idea to income.

We recently held a very successful event with 40 entrepreneur influencers where 250 young people were in attendance. Each influencer, who was selected because of their proven ability to identify a gap in the market and align their passion, shared their stories in 15-minute presentations. Their stories are also available online at www.pioneernation.biz.

Furthermore, as part of our 20 year anniversary celebrations, the Levi Strauss Foundation will be providing grants of \$50,000 each to two Pioneers that are giving back to their communities and making a positive change in the world. These are Greenpop, a social business supporting greening and sustainable living, and 18twenty8, which empowers disadvantaged women between the ages of 18 and 28.

We are always on the lookout for courageous leaders and organisations that take risks and innovate as they address the most pressing social issues of our time, something that we feel both 18Twenty8 and Greenpop embody. Currently we are looking out for the next set of Pioneers for 2015.

For more, view some pictures of the event in this [gallery](#).

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here.
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