

Branding of SA crucial for success of 2010 World Cup

The branding of South Africa's 2010 FIFA World Cup is vital to the success of the tournament away from the football pitch.

By [Nikolaus Eberl](#) 8 Oct 2007

When the final whistle was blown at the FIFA World Cup 2006, the president of the world's largest sports brand, Joseph Blatter, summed up the event by saying, "This was the best World Cup of all time. Never before has an event been presented in such an emotional and global manner".

Indeed, the 2006 World Cup was such overwhelming success that Germany now holds the second most valuable country brand in the Nation Brand Index (NBI), tourism bookings have increased by nearly one third, unemployment has dropped by more than 20%, and investor confidence has surged to an all-time high. Moreover, Germany transformed the negative mood of its population into one of optimism.

There are important lessons that can be harnessed by South Africa from the nation branding strategy deployed by Germany in the lead up and during the World Cup – developing a successful brand through the World Cup will allow South Africa to also reap benefits long after the event.

However, it was no easy task for Germany. Two years before the event, Germany's population was suffering a collective depression, with social divisions, low consumer confidence and record unemployment.

The brand strategy employed by Germany started with people and it launched a massive, internal national change management programme that aimed to create unity and a new vision of Germany.

In getting this vision right, the country recruited researchers to look at the way that Germany was perceived and one word emerged: unfriendly. The strategy moving forward was thus centred on dispelling the idea that Germans were efficient engineers but otherwise unfriendly and it gave rise to the 2006 tournament slogan Time to make friends.

It was then vital to communicate this message for buy-in – both by Germans and by the rest of the world. One of the innovative means was through the arts and a special "Land of Ideas" campaign that placed huge sculptures in Berlin, showcasing German inventions from the printing press, to the formula $E=MC^2$. The private sector funded 50% of the costs of this campaign, which created unbelievable media exposure for Germany.

Creating a winning feeling

Another key element was empowering action that stood by the brand promise of making friends. Germany trained over 100 000 "service ambassadors" in five months and it worked, making Germany a warm and welcoming place for visitors – 90% of people who visited Germany left as brand advocates.

The next part of the strategy was in creating a winning feel around the event and extending the soccer experience beyond the stadiums. An inspired innovation came in the form of the Fan Festivals in cities around Germany. Giant screens were erected in parks to allow many thousands who could not get tickets to gather to celebrate.

An important factor was that Germany did not treat fans like potential hooligans, but treated them with respect and as people there to enjoy the experience.

As Germany lost to Italy in the semi-finals, it was by no means the end of this new vision of Germany. Despite the loss on the field, it could not override that Germany had won the world cup of the hearts. When the team arrived in Stuttgart for the third place game, they were given a hero's welcome – a feeling of pride had been restored regardless of winning or losing.

Three months after the World Cup the brand campaign continued with the release of a film that revealed the passion and drama in the German team's World Cup changing room – it re-ignited sentiments, got people to reconnect and further cemented the German peoples' transformation. Similarly, 48 arts projects were set up to showcase German culture, and there were many positive media reports on the country after the event, reinforcing the new image of Germany.

If South Africa can use this example to provide the best World Cup ever, as President Thabo Mbeki has promised, it can enjoy similar benefits for years to come.

To be the best World Cup ever, however, challenges every single person and organisation on the continent to help and become champions.

Cities must aspire to the highest standards – there will be two types of customers at the World Cup: visitors and media. The media are key to showing what South Africa is really about to the world.

And of course, having a competitive football team can add immeasurable value. Although the German team did not win the World Cup, their competitive spirit gave the nation something special.

It is where great stories and heroes are made, and it can uplift a nation in ways no campaign can.

Eberl is a partner in the Izicwe Academy, which focuses on internal branding aligning employee commitment with a company's brand promise. This is a summary of his talk at the UCT Graduate School of Business this September.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>