Innscor's brands caught in a storm

By Sam Hungwe

30 Mar 2009

Zimbabwe's retail giant, Innscor Africa, which runs a boutique of franchised fast food outlets across the country, is experiencing a brand crisis due to declining standards. This emerged from court documents following the arrest, made by immigration authorities, of Omer Rouben an Israel national recruited to head its brand loyalty division and revitalise the faltering brands.

Rouben, who holds a tourist visa, was recruited after local brand managers failed to deliver on a directive to improve the image of the outlets.

The brand managers, who felt they were being sidelined after the sacking of the retail giant's marketing manager, tipped immigration officials about Rouben's immigration status, leading to his arrest.

It is this immigration dispute that has brought to the fore concerns by Innscor International Franchising CEO Manoli Vardas over the pathetic standards at Innscor's Zimbabwe outlets.

In a letter to brand managers, dated 3 February, 2009 and filed with immigration, Vardas says to brand managers: “As you have experienced, there has been a considerable upturn in the business across all the brands and it is unacceptable that despite our recent conversations that standards have to be improved, little has been done on an operational level and in fact in some cases operational standards have regressed.”

The Steers franchise held by Innscor but owned by South Africa's Famous Brands has struggled to meet standard Steers menus and quality. Similarly, the Nandos franchise, a South African brand with a Portuguese theme, has also been in a precipitous crisis.

The Chicken Inn, Pizza Inn and Creamy Inn brands have also hit hard times, while the Bakers Inn brand, which sells confectionaries and pies, has diverted and is selling rice, cooking oil and flour like a supermarket outlet.