

Five ideas to reach consumers successfully in 'unbranded' Africa

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In an 'unbranded' continent such as Africa - the new branding frontier - where masses of people gather every day to get services and goods, brands that can deliver on experience, emotion and social responsibility will gain trust, love and loyalty among communities, HKLM director [Gary Harwood](#) said last night, Wednesday 12 October 2011.



Gary Harwood

Harwood, who was speaking at the GIBS marketing and innovations forum in Johannesburg, suggested the following five ideas which he believes could help a brand successfully reach the African consumer

1. Establishing partnerships and gaining local knowledge
2. Acknowledging, respecting and celebrating individual and cultural backgrounds, beliefs and languages
3. Finding inspirations at the source
4. Embracing both the formal and the informal
5. Thinking beyond traditional advertising

"Get out of the office"

Unpacking these ideas one by one, brand expert Harwood told the audience: "You will have to get out of the office and go out there to build relationships and partnerships, and gather local knowledge.

"In every single country we operate in, we are always looking for a local partner," he revealed, adding that there is no success without a certain degree of affinity.

HKLM, a company of which Harwood is a founding member, has been helping to build local brands in Africa for the past 12

years.

Massively invested

Since coming back from the 'dead' and reclaiming its rightful place in the community of nations, South Africa has massively invested in the rest of the continent, with the ANC-led government going here and there to forge bilateral relations, and local companies splurging fortunes to expand their wings into various African territories.

SA's foreign direct investment into Africa currently stands at US\$15 billion (about R120 billion), Standard Bank research analyst [Simon Freemantle](#) said [last week](#).

Once known as the 'Dark Continent', Africa has been experiencing a torrential rain of foreign investments in the last decade, mostly due to its higher returns and almost untapped business sources, as most of the developed markets continue to stutter. But, Harwood warned SA brands that are embarking on an African investment adventure to be tolerant of local cultures, and to tell African stories if they are to position themselves as powerful brands.

"African stories to be told"

"There are a lot of African stories to be told because of some positive elements and developments that have occurred in the last decade," Freemantle told journalists last week in Johannesburg.

"And companies that will be able to unlock these elements will be in a better position," Freemantle said.

Harwood, however, said SA brands wanting to go into Africa need to embrace both the formal and the informal. "Outside the main centres, there are far more informal sectors, so don't hesitate to tap into those markets," he urged, adding that brands need to think beyond the traditional advertising.

Africa is very social

Despite battling with illiteracy and infrastructure problems, Harwood said Africa is very social, as people like to stand shoulder to shoulder via social networks, viewing TV centres and newspaper rental outlets.

"So look for strategies how you can engage with these people to ensure that they see your brand. Remember that a brand is a reputation of a product or a company towards its audiences," Harwood, said.

Harwood, who is also chairperson of the SA Communication Design Council and was the recipient of the University of Johannesburg's 2005 Alumni Dignitas Award, is said to be passionate about emerging markets.

Hosted in partnership with *FinWeek*

The [GIBS Marketing Concepts & Innovations Emerging in Africa Forums](#) are hosted in partnership with *FinWeek* magazine. The next forum, themed 'Innovation Management in the SA Context', will be held on 27 October 2011.

[Download Harwood's presentation](#) (1.31 MB).

Download link added at 4.42pm on 13 October 2011.

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Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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