

How Germany won the World Cup of Nation Branding: BrandOvation featured by the Business Day

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In a recent issue of South Africa's leading business daily, The Business Day, Internal Branding Expert Dr Nikolaus Eberl shares his insight on how Germany won the World Cup of Nation Branding.

When the final whistle is blown on July 11 2010, will the president of the world's largest sports brand, Joseph Blatter, be able to reiterate his summary of the 2006 World Cup, that "This was the best World Cup of all time?"

What happened in Germany during the four weeks to July 9 2006 was a celebration of Brand Germany, with such overwhelming success that the latest Nation Brand index lists Germany as the second-most admired country brand, up from seventh place previously.

Apart from soccer, the 2006 World Cup transformed Brand Germany from the old image — effective and efficient, yet cold, unfriendly and, at times, bullying — to a new image: fun-loving, welcoming, modern and creative.

This did something that no politician had ever achieved — it imbued the nation with a sense of pride and common destiny.

On the day after the final, Britain's Times, not known for being pro-German, ran the headline: "Never mind the Finals, the true Winners are Germany!"

Barely two years before the World Cup, Germany was a very different place — a nation so plagued by self-doubt that it was diagnosed by its own president as entering "collective depression". The German soccer team had crashed out of the first round of the European championship, the Bundesliga was riddled by match-fixing scandals, and xenophobia had gripped certain areas of eastern Germany such that politicians were advising people of colour against entering so-called "no-go zones".

So how did Germany achieve such a dramatic turnaround in branding fortunes? Before we answer this, let us have a quick look at Brand SA. On the Nation Brand index, SA currently ranks 32nd out of 35 nations surveyed, down from 22nd place in 2005.

This indicates that SA's brand promise, "Alive with Possibility", is not being realised, and that issues such as safety, telecommunications, investor relations and HIV/AIDS are out of alignment with the national brand promise.

Hosting "the most successful World Cup ever" obliges SA to raise the bar at what I call the seven pillars of Germany's rebranding success.

First is delivering the brand promise. Germany's World Cup brand promise, "A Time to make Friends", was borne out of the heartfelt attempt by Germans to shake off the old image of being conservative, cold and boring, and to prove to the world that Germans can be great hosts too. Which national cause can SA tap into to craft a 2010 promise that can be delivered consistently by every South African?

A successful World Cup requires a winning host team, to shore up the support and enthusiasm of the host nation. Before their first game, only 8% of Germans supported their team. By the time Germany had progressed to third place, the support base had grown to a massive 95%. Bafana Bafana, ranked 59th on the Fifa world rankings, will have to advance to the final to truly deliver SA's brand promise!

It is estimated that for each visitor to the World Cup, another 150 will be indirectly influenced in their perceptions about the host country, through word of mouth initiated by the visitors when they return home.

Germany had an estimated 5-million visitors, which yields a potential brand audience of 750-million — a truly remarkable reach in re-branding the nation.

Prior to the tournament, German papers were filled with angst about the possibility of neo-Nazi demonstrations and xenophobia; instead, the entire four weeks of the World Cup were free of crime and violence, creating a sense of safety and comfort among the visitors and the host nation.

To host "the most successful World Cup ever", SA has to deliver a crime-free World Cup, which means zero incidents during the event and safe conduit and free passage (at any time of day and night) at the time of the final Fifa inspection in 2008. This is clearly the single most urgent brand touch-point to be resolved.

The key to extending the World Cup experience from the spectators in the stadiums to the millions of fans assembled outside was the new concept of hosting fan festivals. At one point, the Berlin fan festival was counting nearly a million fans from all over the world, following the game at gigantic screens.

To host the best World Cup ever calls for reinventing the entertainment aspects of the Fifa World Cup and coming up with a truly African experience.

As with any business, the success of the product "Soccer World Cup" will be determined by how well the client will be served, not the supplier. This is why the German Football Association went out of their way for the clients of the World Cup. These were the spectators, but particularly the media, without whom the World Cup would be a nonevent.

The government and the football association went out of their way to cater for the media's every need. Given the strained relations between the South African Football Association and the media, this aspect needs to be looked at carefully in

preparation for 2010 — especially after the recent media snub, when members of the international media were called for an urgent briefing on the 2010 preparations, only to be told after two hours of waiting that local organising committee officials scheduled for the briefing were unavailable.

For the first time in the history of World Cup soccer, in Germany women embraced this previously men-dominated event whole-heartedly. More than 40% of visitors at the fan festivals were female, and already the new Bundesliga season in Germany has witnessed a spillover effect — whereas two years ago, only 23% of spectators at the stadiums were female, this has now risen to nearly one-third.

Nation branding, much like personal branding, is to a large extent dependent upon the self-image of its main character — the citizens.

The Fifa World Cup 2006 boosted the German national psyche and bestowed Germans with the long-lost emotions of national pride and self-confidence.

For 2010 to do the same for the South African psyche, a national campaign is required that is aimed at transforming the soul, not the looks, of the country.

IziCwe Academy is the global leader in Internal Branding™ Services. Based upon twelve years of global research, IziCwe Academy has assimilated best global practices in Internal Branding™ to assist corporate organisations to align employee commitment to their brand promise and motivate employees to engage in touch-point innovation™.

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