

Newspaper congress offers scoop for Brand SA

The World Association of Newspapers Congress in Cape Town next month offers a “fantastic opportunity” for Brand South Africa to show the world what it has achieved, according to the CEO of the International Marketing Council, Yvonne Johnstone. “The eyes of the world are on us, not just because of the 2010 World Cup,” she said.

“We have to make use of the opportunity WAN provides. There is widespread interest in our progress,” she added.

The IMC was formed in 2000 with the mandate of creating a positive, united image for South Africa that, through its Brand South Africa campaign, aimed at making the country internationally competitive.

“The purpose of the IMC is to stimulate interest in the country, to attract trade, investment and tourism and to highlight some of SA's important achievements.

Unmatched opportunity

“WAN provides an unmatched opportunity for us to get our message across to 1500 top editors from around the world,” she said.

Johnstone is certainly no stranger to the power of the press. The role of the IMC is to tell the good news about SA, and to counteract any negative news stories that appear. To that end, three prominent expatriate journalists are employed: John Battersby in London, Simon Barber in the US and Govin Reddy in India. Their role is to daily counteract any inaccurate or negative coverage on SA.

“Our job is to tell the truth about SA and if we feel this is not being done, then we have a duty to put the matter right,” she said.

According to figures given by Minister in the Presidency Essop Pahad, during the budget vote of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) in Parliament on Tuesday, 22 May 2007, Brand South Africa's weight in the global marketplace is today valued at over R500 billion. He praised the work done by the IMC to elevate awareness of the country and to extend the SA country brand formula from the UK and US to India.

Johnstone said issues such as crime and the effects of black economic empowerment were sometimes portrayed in a negative way.

“We provide information that tells the full story and creates a balance,” she said. “The WAN conference gives us an opportunity to show editors from around the world, many of whom may be visiting for the first time, what SA is really like.”

Widespread interest in SA

Johnstone believes there is widespread interest in SA and a constant search for information about the country. However she points out that the information required by prospective visitors does not always correspond with issues that are considered pertinent within SA.

“For example, there is not nearly as much interest in the succession (to the presidency) debate outside the country as there is inside.”

Referring to crime, an issue which seems to dominate every aspect of daily life in South Africa, she said it needed to be put into perspective.

“Crime is a global problem. The real issue is to ask: ‘What is being done about it?’” she said, pointing to the “definite emphasis on dealing with the crime issue” in the past two weeks.

Johnstone is excited by recently released figures which show that tourism in SA grew by 15% in the last year, representing three times the global average.

“Tourism to SA is a hot issue and interest will continue to grow,” she said.

For more information on the World Association of Newspapers Congress, go to www.capetown2007.co.za.

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