

Ugandan brands battle for post London Olympics shine

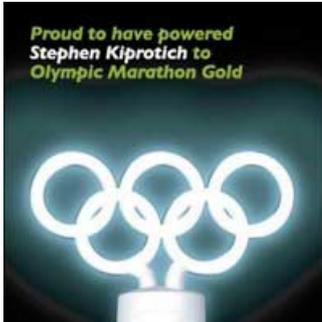
 By Walter Wafula

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Looks like Season II of the London 2012 Olympics is taking shape in Uganda with big, small, popular and almost forgotten brands taking part in the 'Olympics brand championship.'

Brands including: MTN, Umeme, Airtel, Aqua Sipi, East African Breweries Limited (eabl), and Kakira Sugar, are among the many that have positioned themselves to gain from the post London Olympics publicity related to Uganda's only medalist, Stephen Kiprotich.

On Tuesday, 14 August 2012, mobile operator Airtel Uganda tweaked its super fast (3.75G) internet newspaper advertisement to celebrate Olympic Gold medalist Stephen Kiprotich's win at the 2012 London Olympics games. "Speed brings home the Gold. Airtel congratulates Stephen Kiprotich and Uganda on a historic Olympic Gold medal." The headline copy initially read: "Super fast internet."



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Then, Umeme, Uganda's electricity distributor used the opportunity to remind Ugandans of its role in his win with a full page advert in the *Red Pepper* that read, "Proud to have powered Stephen Kiprotich to Olympic Marathon Gold." Umeme made the first call and provided Team Uganda support in form of air travel costs, when it was time for the team to represent Uganda at the London games.

On Wednesday, Kakira Sugar, a local sugar manufacturer published a half page advert titled; The Sweetness of Winning, in the *Daily Monitor*. "Kakira sugar joins the entire nation in congratulating Stephen Kiprotich in winning the gold medal for our nation and welcomes him back. You have made us proud."

The brand championships were lit by Stephen Kiprotich's historic win of the 42km 2012 Men's Olympic Marathon in London on Sunday. The marathon star clocked 2hr 08min 01sec in the race, beating his closest Kenyan rivals Abel Kirui and namesake Wilson Kipsang Kiprotich. The long awaited moment ended Uganda's 40-year wait for an Olympic Gold medal. The nation last won one in 1972 when the late John Akii-Bua won Gold at the 1972 Munich Olympics 400 metres hurdles.

The milestone sparked off excitement among Ugandans worldwide as was mirrored by social and traditional media. PR and brand strategists joined the bandwagon to exploit the golden opportunity to market their brands, products, and services.



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While many Ugandans were still celebrating the remarkable achievement, Vision Group launched a 7-day cash drive to raise \$500 000 to reward Kiprotich for a remarkable performance. "Over US\$100 000 [has been] raised so far in a space of 3 hours," Robert Kabushenga, chief executive officer at Vision Group posted on his Facebook wall after he launched the patriots' drive.

By Wednesday, Vision Group had raised over \$120 000 in cash and pledges from individuals and corporations including; Tullow Oil, Crown Beverages Limited, Nation Social Security Fund, MTN, DFCU Bank, Crane Bank, Bank of Uganda, Stanbic Bank and Standard Chartered Bank.

"We are overwhelmed by the positive response of this campaign. The most humbling has been the individuals' Mobile Money (Uganda) and Western Union (diaspora) contributions," Kabushenga is reported to have said.

At the national level, president Yoweri Museveni, handed over a cheque for US\$80 000 to Kiprotich and promised to

construct a three bed-roomed house for his parents. The former prison warden's employer, Uganda Prisons, also promoted him to assistant superintendent in the prisons service. The hero's gold medal has been described as a perfect gift for Uganda which marks its golden jubilee Independence celebrations in October 2012.

More institutions are still figuring out how they can associate themselves with the Olympic medalist. A number of branding opportunities remain unexploited for many companies, individuals and organisations. Marketing gurus have to simply think out of the box to get the most out of the moment and star.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

Walter Wafula is a seasoned journalist who has reported for the *Daily Monitor* newspaper in Kampala-Uganda. He is also a contributor on Bizcommunity.com website. Email Walter at wafwalt@yahoo.com and connect on LinkedIn.

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