

Changing Africa's reputation. PR agencies are you game?

By  Danette Breitenbach

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How can we manage a client that has battled to manage its reputation for literally hundreds of years? A client that when the world thinks about it, thinks gender inequality, war, HIV/Aids, famine, poverty, corruption...



Source © fabio formaggio [123rf](#) We need to shift the narrative of the African continent says Christine McKeown, creative group head, Razor PR

“Meet the client, the African continent,” says Christine McKeown, creative group head, Razor PR. “With perceptions so entrenched around the continent, could there be a client that needs reputation management more?”

In recent years, the continent has undergone a transformation that is remarkable, shaping its own destiny and changing its narrative. It should be referred to as the African opportunity.

How do we change it? She says we do. “Africa’s reputation management consultancy is the PR sector. It’s us – you and me. We are the collective consultancy that must manage Africa’s reputation.”

McKeown says it is PR campaigns that can educate the rest of the world and stop the oncoming stereotypes about the continent, changing the narrative of Africa.

So much work to do

Africa needs to divert its efforts of looking to produce content like that of other third-world countries, there is no uniqueness there. “Rather we need to create content that is originally African, and we can do this to create local PR campaigns and content to educate those who think Africa is a country... Yes this is where we are starting, which shows just how much work there is to do.”

But there are powerful stories coming out of the continent on a daily basis, and she says PR agencies can start by pushing the pro-African content of our clients.

“Agencies can focus on different countries on the continent. Is there anything more exciting than the amount of culture across the continent? It’s just a starting point but there are limitless opportunities.

“PR campaigns can foster Africa as a place of investment to change the scope of selling Africa to selling *out* of Africa,” she says.



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Connecting the head and the heart

She adds to this saying that we need to apply African solutions to African problems and stop looking for solutions from across the sea. “We cannot solve African problems with international solutions. Just because it works in developed countries does not mean it will work here.

“This means we need to align our values with African brands and individuals and develop communications strategies to fit the continent. And this means talking to our heart.”

Nelson Mandela famously said: “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.”

“As PR professionals, the key is finding the head and the heart connection, in any work and situation, and when get this connection, then we are winning.

“This means creative strategy and messaging that resonates with Africans and connects to their heart.”

And this, McKeown says, is so important because while changing the way the world views Africa is critical, changing the way we view ourselves is even more so.

“The negative narrative around Africa comes from inside. It is that collective feeling that African people have that we are not good enough and cannot compete on the international stage, that our music, art, fashion, etc., is not good enough.”

We are enough

But change is happening and there are Africans breaking these barriers as innovation is thriving on the continent. She says, “We see it in music, art, and fashion as well as technology, and this showcases Africa in an honest and authentic way, leading us to occupy different spaces.

“Because we are enough. In fact, we are better because we are interesting and live with heart.”

The fact is, she states, that we can change the narrative. “If you feel like you cannot make an impact, because it is such a

massive job, start with your own clients. Do work from the heart with authenticity, as African communicators communicating African messages.

“Let’s become the combined consultancy for Africa. Together we have power.

“So, PR agencies are you game?”

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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