

branding

Building the Ghana brand



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ABSTRACT: Like many African countries, Ghana's natural assets and recent achievements remain obscured from potential investors and tourists because the country has no strategic brand-building initiative in place with which it can market itself to the rest of the world. An official country website — showcasing its most positive aspects — would be the ideal (and most cost-effective) way to do this and would greatly help promote Ghana and its attractions for foreign investment.

The world over, countries now compete in a global economy against each other. The consequence is that an unbranded country may find itself lost in all the clutter because those it tries to influence may not know what it stands for. Ghana's recent achievements — which include incident-free elections, good governance, press freedom, a sound investment climate, a good credit rating, a 2006 Soccer World Cup presence and the hosting of the 2008 Africa Cup of Nations — gives it much to say about itself. Besides, it has many natural endowments which represent a considerable appeal and thus offer great possibilities for a world-class eco-tourism destination. However, this nation appears not to be capitalising on these to brand or sell itself to the world.

As a nation, these valuables could be packaged and managed very well. A lot of countries are making great strides in this direction. South Africa, which has internalised the importance of nation-branding, has consequently become a world-class competitor in this arena.

Ghana needs to understand that nation brand architecture is vital for developing countries. It therefore needs to manage its image in a more formalised way in order to improve tourism, investment and even foreign relations.

Branding is the way in which an organisation communicates, differentiates and symbolises itself to its audience. National branding does the same thing, but on a country level. For Ghana, this may be to encourage foreign direct investment, create internal pride, or be a support for exports and local industries or any enterprise like the President's Special Initiatives (PSI) or Support Made in Ghana Goods. Ghana can therefore develop and communicate strong brand identity which could help speed up development by attracting foreign investors and tourists. That, in turn, could increase political influence, build confidence among the population and help the country's industries grow.

Many African countries suffer from negative perceptions as a result of their location. A clear case in point is Ghana. Although this country is relatively stable, it is detrimentally sandwiched between unstable neighbours.

As part of a nation-branding strategy, official country websites could be an effective conduit in providing a snapshot of Ghana's current developments. This is also a far cheaper medium than paying for advertising slots on the traditional international broadcast and cable TV channels, or print media. Besides, the reach of these traditional media is relatively limited.

It has been established that potential investors and tourists visit official websites and other related sites for information about a country. Ghana therefore has no choice but to make use of this platform to market and brand itself.

A cursory look at the websites of countries like Botswana, South Africa, Tanzania and Rwanda reveal the importance of how African countries are leaving no stone unturned in taking advantage of the Internet.

The official website of Botswana, for example, makes much of the facts that that country has the highest investment rating, the fastest-growing economy, the least corruption and the lowest corporate tax rate in Africa.

By contrast, Ghana's official country website (www.ghana.gov.gh) functions as a news portal which

seems to be competing with the Ghana News Agency and other online news portals such as ghanaweb.com, ghanatoday.com, ghanareview.org, and newsinghana.com

Though the official government home page can carry daily political, economic and social news about a country, this should not be the prime focus. An attempt should be made to strategically use the website to portray and co-ordinate the country's national values and endowments, thereby packaging them to build the overall nation brand. As a matter of urgency, web managers and branding

Official country websites could be an effective conduit in portraying Ghana's investment and tourism attractions

administrators should focus their attention on how best such achievements and endowments could be packaged and communicated online in the national portal. In terms of functionality, visitors to the site should not find it difficult to find information about the country's people, geography and climate, history, governance and investment opportunities, tourism and governmental agencies.

The links on Ghana's official portal to potentially resourceful sites are actually so tiny and hidden that visitors may not be tempted to click on them, while the choice of words do not communicate brand personalities.

The rationale behind an official website should be such that it carries first-hand and concise information to foreigners, interested individuals/organisations and the citizenry. To the audience, it should showcase what the nation has achieved, where it is in terms of development and progress, its competences, where it wants to go and where it needs a helping hand in terms of investment and foreign assistance. To the citizenry, it should also make available where and how to find different state institutions and agencies. The government can use the website to publish tenders and other official transactional fees charged by various ministries, departments and institutions.

In this way, nation branding campaigns can raise Ghana's morale, team spirit and sense of purpose, helping it achieve a common sense of purpose and national pride – not to mention a higher standard of living. ■