

The UKZN Griot Of Branding and Corporatisation

WORDS: KEYAN G TOMASELLI

In response to a previous column, *Traffic and Ranking*, a UWC professor sent me the following: "The university authorities have money to beautify buildings, putting the UWC badge on every little door of each building. And yet, they do not have money to fund the research of deserving PhD and Masters' students! So, the DoE should rate the universities whose campuses appear the 'most beautiful' [an additional criterion] as this latest fad of 'branding'. [Remember, they used to do it to slaves and farmers still do it to their animals!]...we live in a 'totally' commodified society/world, where everything has a number, a price tag.... Classical scholars must be turning in their graves!"

How does this apply at UKZN? Well, the easily quantifiable chaos at the front gate of Howard College continues, the confusion defying Corporate Relations' attempts to cleanly brand the campus/University. This got me to thinking about UKZN brands historically. My own relationship with Natal University (NU) started when I was headhunted in early 1984 to take up my present post. My image of NU then was that it was run by the NP mafia of Owen Horwood and Laurence McCrystal, so I had to be dragged to my interview by Chris Ballantine and friends. Here I was met by the hugest selection committee and a whole new bunch of top academic managers who had deposed the terrible two-some. NU was now a cauldron of anti-apartheid liberalism, Marxism, community projects and labour activism, not to mention other forms of subversion driven by Fatima Meer's indefatigable Black Research Centre.

One of my first administrative tasks in 1985 was to publish a lecturer ad in *The Weekly Mail*. The PR Division was run by a ex-paint executive, who told me that the *Rand Daily Mail* had closed – being a media professor didn't I know that? So I went to Adams Bookshop, bought a copy of *The Weekly Mail*, and donated it to the PR Division. The paint man was later succeeded by an executive from the sugar industry who developed a publishing empire par excellence. Communication was top of his agenda, but not branding. By the late 1980s it was becoming clear that NU was lacking a brand and an identity, and that the majority of Durban school children were totally unaware that there was a university in Durban, let alone two.

So, here at CCMS, working with Honours and MA students we derived from first



principles a numerical model for the No Name University (NNU). By now, NU had appointed a new Director to Public Affairs who integrated media, branding, and marketing. He curtailed the publishing industry and contracted expensive private research consultants to develop an NU brand. This was born the very successful Superman, Rolls Royce and Basketball campaign, "The Power to Succeed" which informed Natalians that at least one university in Durban existed. The No Name University recovered its earlier name Natal University which included beautifying campuses and providing branded and coherent signage. Applications increased. Our students who evaluated the campaign were astonished at the crudity of the professional research, but at least this experience taught them that they could hold their own in any forum.

Then along came the **New** Name University. During this period, Corporate Relations lost its way, and antagonistic models of communication proliferated. The publication empire was resurrected. This period witnessed the battle of the brands as different constituencies within the New Name University sought to inject their respective, often opposing, brands, agendas and philosophies. The letterhead crest was indigenized, the new catch phrase is something about African scholarship that fails to easily roll off the tongue, and corporatisation ran riot. Such is the lot of institutions and their hapless employees in the Information Age. (This will be the subject of a column to come, after which *UKZNDABA* may have to find a new columnist to replace this one who will be surely put out to pasture.) The joke in the UK about the Research Assessment Evaluations is that at any one time half the UK academics are evaluating the other half. At least, in the UK, it's the academics who are doing the evaluating, not the bureaucrats!

Here at UKZN, we've now reached a more stable phase. We're no longer embarrassed with our history. We know this because the April UKZNDABA published stories on the topic with black and white photos. History always happened in black and white – remember *African Mirror*, *Pathé News*, *Movietone* and now The History Channel? The former were

FLOPO BOASTS Internet Connection

Students from the UKZN Florence Powell (Flopo) Residence can now enjoy the convenience of wireless internet connection in their own rooms.

WORDS & PHOTO: LUNGA MEMELA

The students are proud of their House Committee representative, Mr Buhle-Bemvelo Dube, who presented the idea early this year to Mr Abdullah Shariff from Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Durban Technical Services and UKZN Student Housing Director, Mr Sifiso Dlodla.



From left: House Committee Secretary, Ms Thandazile Thabethe; Media and Publicity Officer, Ms Zama Phungula; Sports Officer, Mr Dumisani Khumalo; Treasurer, Mr Samukelo Magcaba; Chairperson, Mr Mvelo Dube; and Committee Development, Mr Siyabonga Ngongoma.

Prior to being elected as the residence's House Committee representative, Mr Dube was driven by the student body's 2009 manifesto raising their concerns about working late evenings at the on-campus local area network (LANs). This led him to approach Mr Shariff who was interested in the idea but advised him to involve the Director's Office of UKZN Student Housing and submit a

detailed letter of proposal.

Broadcast from a central hub and run by radio waves, a wireless LAN required quite an expensive budget, but persistence and perseverance clinched the deal after several weeks of negotiations with ICT and

Student Housing.

"A few weeks later with four connection points, students of Flopo can do most of their work from the convenience of their rooms, ensuring their safety when working in the evenings," said Mr Dube.

Sudoku

2					1	4		
	3	1						2
7	4			5	2			
		5			9	6		
			5				4	
8	1						7	
				1	2		5	
					7		6	
				6	4		1	3

the weekly newsreels some of us were allowed to watch in cinemas prior to 1980. Colour pics are always more nuanced – divisive dichotomies disappear behind the inclusive tones.

Revitalizing our institutional history is now being leveraged for brand-building, and is as important as is beautifying campuses and making them livable.

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Produced by Corporate Relations. Tel: 031 260 1245/8668/2957 www.ukzn.ac.za