

The fine art of building a brand for modern traditionalists

By [Richard Papo](#), issued by [Grey Africa](#)

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As the world and the media environment becomes more diversified, branding is taking on an entirely new role. No longer is it just a way to identify your product and create an interest in it. Today's successful brands engage with their audiences and build relationships with them based on shared values, interests, history, and culture. And as we celebrate Africa Month it's timely to acknowledge that staying connected to the heritage that defines us is becoming more and more important as cultures become less homogenous. Connecting with known and well-loved brands is an important part of that because it enables us to maintain and celebrate our identities.



Richard Papo

As a brand that's deeply rooted in heritage and tradition, Viceroy is a case in point. Rites and celebrations are almost always marked by sharing or making a gift of Viceroy, especially at lobola ceremonies. At this very special life event, it's offered as vul'umlomo, a gift to the uncles of the bride and groom for their roles in negotiating the marriage union.

As popular hip-hop artist, Solo Ntsizwa, tells it, his Dad always says, "Let's have a toast to that, my son," on occasions like these. Raising a glass of Viceroy is the ultimate celebration of timeless and honoured African traditions. So there's a lot to be learnt from looking at the brand as a case study.

To begin with, everything we do is based on a well-defined core message: that it's possible to live your heritage every day and to take it with you wherever you go. Heritage isn't static; it's a dynamic and constantly evolving part of life. For example, while more people live in cities today than even a generation ago, they're still celebrating their traditions, just in a way that's been adapted to their current living arrangements.

In other words, as quickly as society and culture are evolving, some things remain unchanged – and keep us connected to ourselves, our family, our community, and our heritage. If I had to find a metaphor to express this quality, I'd say the brand is like a safe harbour. Wherever the journey of life may take you, there's always a place to go home to. A ship doesn't have to choose between the sea and the harbour. It can go on great adventures, but it's also secure in the knowledge that it can return to harbour when it needs or wants to.

Expanding on this concept, we've developed landmark campaigns that associate the brand with a broad cultural heritage; a known safe harbour.

In our Lead a Legacy campaign, for instance, we aligned our brand with well-known personalities such as Robert Marawa, the Mampofus and, of course, Solo Ntsizwa to pay tribute – in a very visible way – to the people, legacies, and traditions that have made Viceroy the brand it is today.

The counterpoint to this is to place the messaging about heritage within a progressive and contemporary context so that the brand can have on-going appeal to traditional audiences as well as fresh appeal to new audiences, like a younger demographic inclusive of women. You could say that our aim is to appeal to modern traditionalists; people who value their culture and heritage, but who also embrace social and cultural innovation and development.

One of the ways in which we meet this challenge is by making extensive use of digital and social media channels, where we are most likely to encounter the full range of audiences we want to engage with. The various channels also enable us to

customise our messaging for the core audiences that each of them attracts.

We also focus on positioning different variants to appeal to different niches within our broader audience profile. Viceroy Five-Year-Old is the heartbeat of the Viceroy range, grounding the brand in its traditional roots and preserving customary ties. Viceroy Ten-Year-Old is our premium variant and one that always has pride of place in the liquor cabinet at home. Viceroy Smooth Gold, on the other hand, is positioned to appeal to a younger demographic, including young women. We emphasise that Viceroy is a brand that can be enjoyed in any way; straight up, on the rocks, with a traditional mixer, or even in a luxurious cocktail.

We're consciously aiming to appeal to the mixed-gender, home-consumption market, carving a new space for an established favourite. This is especially true in the wake of Covid-19. We also use very segmented messaging. After all, if you want to touch the hearts and minds of your audiences, you need to speak to them in their own language; in a language which, in itself, celebrates heritage and tradition. That's why we use vernacular languages in a lot of our communications.

Branding mavens know the value of established relationships, but also know that those relationships constantly need to be refreshed and reinvented. Culture isn't static, it evolves with time. It celebrates its roots, but it also celebrates its evolution. That's what we set out to do with Viceroy.

For more information about Viceroy, the brandy with character shaped by generations, visit www.viceroy.co.za, find us on Twitter [@Viceroy_SA](https://twitter.com/Viceroy_SA), or visit us on Facebook [@ViceroySouthAfrica](https://facebook.com/ViceroySouthAfrica).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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