

Branding Menlyn Maine

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People working in the world of brands today need to be more than just creative; they need to be astute business people who create and manage tools in order to drive business growth. For the last three years, we have worked on some interesting projects that have stretched the team to think wide and deliver some unique solutions for driving business growth.

One of these projects is Menlyn Maine, a city development in Pretoria. The client approached us with this challenge, "How do we get our first big tenant now that the market has turned?" The development comprises 140000m2 commercial office space, 35000m2 retail space and 85000m2 upmarket residential space.

The client team explored how they could make this development sustainable in order to drive premium rentals. After extensive investigation into the product, market and sustainable property development, they decided the way to position the brand and leverage the economic value was through building the first green city in Africa.

The challenge was that sustainable buildings come at a premium of around 6% and in the middle of a recession, attracting tenants was now even harder. Understanding this, we were convinced that it was still the only way to drive market differentiation, economic viability and product longevity.

The other challenge with sustainability is that it was evident that there was a great deal of 'green-washing' going on in the property market and credibility was often being questioned. To overcome this, the Menlyn Maine brand needed to align with credible partners.

Branding partners

Business relationships were formed with the Green Building Council of South African and the Clinton Foundation's Climate+ global program. Aligning with these organizations meant the business had to change certain operational plans and use suitable tools developed by these organizations to guide the building of not only the structures, but the surrounding cityscape as well.

With the development modified, the development could now truly claim to be the first green city in Africa. With the brand positioned and the product firmly defined, all that was standing between it and success were the tenants.

I remember asking the Clinton Foundation why we could not use its name in our marketing collateral to attract customers. The response was, "we only talk about what we have done, as opposed to what we intend doing." This profound statement went against much of what marketers believe in, especially in the property development market. After some discussion, we

came to an agreement and were given the go-ahead to use its brand in relation to key sustainable actions the construction had already taken.

Changing communication

This changed the approach the development needed to take with its communication. Long gone is the mode of thinking "this is who we are, aren't we wonderful, buy us." We had to come up with a different way to talk to the market in order to get those tenants. We also realized that potential tenants' knowledge of sustainability and how it affects business' bottom line was not only extremely limited but also naïve.

Therefore, the communication needed to take on a unique form. We developed a communication plan that had three core thrusts.

The first spoke to educating tenants on how being in a green building and precinct can aid their business financially, directly on the bottom line, while giving them strategic marketing leverage with their customers. The second thrust was about driving green credibility through highlighting green actions already taken in the first phase of the development and participating as a member of the green global community. The campaign's third phase spoke emotively about the concept of "movement" and the need to change, to not be left behind and to be inspired by the opportunity that lies ahead.

With the communications campaign launched and actively managed, the first big tenant came knocking, Nedbank, the 'green bank' of South Africa. Its reason for choosing the development for its regional headquarters was that, out of all the property options, it was the only development that understood what it takes to deliver a sustainable building and city. Shortly after this, the next big tenant - Softline VIP - signed up and the future potential tenant list started to grow.

The development has already successfully used its brand - of being Africa's first green city - as a very effective tool to drive product development and the business agenda.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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