

# Why are Seven of the Top Ten brands in the world American?

The most recent Interbrand Top 100 Brand Survey revealed that out of the top 10 brands in the world, seven are American. On a recent trip to the United States this got me thinking. What is it that enables the country, or the people, to achieve to the levels of success that they do? One obvious answer is that the sheer size of the place and the population gives the country an enormous pool of talent on which to draw. Another possible answer lies in America's history and the pioneering spirit that has been honed over years of development. Culture is yet another - the popular and consumer culture of the United States is highly developed and sophisticated. .

However, these answers beg the question why places such as Europe (which, although not united is also large with a highly developed and equally sophisticated culture) or the East have not achieved the same spectacular global branding success. There's no denying that some great branding success stories have come out of these regions, but when one considers even the Top 100 brands in the world, America still seems to possess the magic ingredient and comes out head and shoulders above the rest, clinching 52 of the top spots.

In the Top Ten, the seven American brands include Coca-Cola, Microsoft, IBM, GE, Intel, McDonald's and Disney. Consider some of the others, which although lower down in the asset value pecking order, are equally powerful. They include Google, Apple, Marlboro, American Express, Kellogg's, Starbucks, Yahoo!, KFC, Amazon.com, Motorola and Kodak, to name but a few. The Interbrand Survey assesses these brands not only by considering their current value, but also by taking into account the perceived future value of the brand, and then calculating what percentage of the company earnings result from the power of the brand itself.

Although America is experiencing one of its most difficult periods in recent times, with a looming economic recession, a disastrous occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and global popularity at an all-time low, the country continues to churn out brands in which the world is happy to put its faith – and its money. In trying to find a reason for why this is the case, it is my opinion that much of the answer lies in one simple sentiment: confidence.

Generally speaking Americans exude confidence. No other nation in the world seems to possess confidence in its ability to do almost anything, on quite the same scale. On my visit to the country, I was struck by the abundance of consumer, investor and business confidence. It seems to be part of what it is to be essentially American - almost as if people are born with some innate belief that they can achieve anything. Given to them by their country of birth or choice, they are first American, thereafter Jewish, Iranian, Black, Female, etc.

Compare America to Britain, which only managed to achieve five top brands (HSBC, BP, Reuters, Smirnoff and Burberry), none of which make it to the Top Twenty. And the country has only one global brand celebrity: Richard Branson. Full of confidence, he gets more flack from those in his home country than is imaginable for one person trying to succeed in the branding arena. And yet, against all odds, he has. And while he may not have featured in the survey, arguably he is their most high profile brand export. Why? Because he has the confidence to believe he can. The Brits seldom display confidence, they tend to be apologetic.

This innate confidence has a profound effect on how American countries approach both product development and brand management. From the product innovation of iPod and the elaborate imagination of Pixar, to brands like Yahoo or Google that change the way we operate globally, American companies continue to push the outer limits of what other believe is possible to come up with brands that are truly innovative..

But it is not only in building innovative brands that Americans excel, but also in managing them. From people to operations, distribution to communication, brands are managed holistically and with assurance. It is a certain energy and mentality of self-belief in this ability to succeed that permeates all aspect of the branding business and enables them to confidently portray themselves in the discipline of marketing and branding. Marketing is a primary focus – it influences product development, investor relations, messaging etc. Its almost as if there's a declaration that inspires or is intended to inspire confidence, ensuring that those involved are freed of uncertainty. And clearly it has some real effect.

If the American example is anything to go by, confidence is a real, tangible asset. South Africans would do well to take note.