

Under Armour, challenger brand, shows up, launches icon brand house in Sandton City

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

29 Apr 2024

Under Armour launched the first of two planned icon flagship stores at Sandton City in Sandton, Gauteng on Freedom Day, 27 April. The second store will be located at the V&A in Cape Town.



Image supplied. Brent Collinicos, general manager, Apollo Brands at the opening of Under Armour's first icon store in Sandton City, Sandton, Gauteng

With the largest floor space for the brand in South Africa - it spans over 344 square meters - the store, which has been three years in the making, is a physical manifestation of the brand's evolution and investment into southern Africa, showcasing its Brand House City Concept Evolution (BCC EVO) concept.

"The store is unlike anything we have ever done. We wanted to make a bold statement to show the brand's evolution and commitment to invest," says Brent Collinicos, general manager of Apollo Brands (Pty) Ltd, the official distributor of Under Armour in South Africa.

Ethos and messaging of the brand

Under Armour has been in the market for eight years. While a relative newcomer that launched as a shirt-under-the-shirt fields sports brand in the US, the brand has expanded its other sports.

"The brand started as a brand for young athletes in team sports and this remains true," says Lorrianne Cloete, head of brand at Apollo Brands.

"It is a brand that understands the locker room moment, the connection and what sport does for you as a young emerging adult. The brand narrative is around that," she further explains.

Right space, right time

Cloete says it has always been on the cards to do two icon flagship stores that put forward the ethos and messaging of the brand.

"It was about finding the right space and size, and investing in the brand experience so we could show up how we want to show up.

"Shopping is one thing, but experiencing what the brand is about, being able to put forward our technology, and our product in the ways we need to, that's what this store is about."



the technologically advanced, fully curved LED storefront of the new Under Armour icon flagship store in Sandton City

Amplifying the shopping experience

While Under Armour stores have been quite boxy, this store has a different feel.

"The customer is coming in with heightened expectations, so we have raised the bar," explains Collinicos.

It showcases a technologically advanced, fully curved LED storefront and Under Armour's only curved footwear wall in the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region.

A transparent LED screen—another first for Under Armour in South Africa - adds a futuristic feel to the store with high-definition visuals.

Local illustration artist Sinenhlanhla Chauke created three hand-drawn illustrations that add a touch of local flavour to the interior and showcase South Africa's rich culture and heritage through sport.



Local illustration artist, Sinenhlanhla Chauke's three hand-drawn illustrations add a touch of local flavour to the store's interior and showcase South Africa's rich culture and heritage through sport (Image supplied)

In store, there is also a 3D-printed relief map of the Johannesburg skyline that highlights key sporting venues around Johannesburg.

The smart fitting rooms are equipped with Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, that acts as a personal shop assistant. Once a shopper enters these fitting rooms, the embedded system recognises the items brought in and immediately displays related products, sizes and colours on an integrated iPad.

Apart from shopper convenience, this personalises the shopping journey by suggesting complementary outfits and alternatives.

But Collinicos says the big touchpoint is the personal one. "Our team engages with the customer in a very authentic way. They are the amplifiers and enablers to the shopping experience."



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Engaging with the youth

With the store, the brand wants to show younger consumers that there is something for them in Under Armour.

Collinicos explains that globally with the brand there is a concerted movement to talk to 16 to 24-year-olds, and team sports athletes.

Locally the brand has a partnership with Supersport Schools. "This is a community we can really engage with," he says.

Cloete adds to this, "As a brand, we want to connect with those in this age category to get into their heart and minds."

“ We are a tough brand. We don't glow, we sweat ”

The journey of athletes

She explains they want to show the youth the journey of athletes and that it is not just winning, but how you win. "It's about the 10 times you lose that teaches you how to win."

Under Armour personifies toughness. "We are a tough brand. We don't glow, we sweat. It's about grit and determination. The brand talks about the focused performer and the journey to compete. We know it's tough, and we unashamedly understand those moments for our athletes. We are pretty hardcore.

"It's about doing the work, and what happens when you get knocked down, how you get back up again and how you support your team of athletes. That's the story we tell. That is where Under Armour sits," Cloete says.



Professional boxer Kevin Lerena being interviewed by media at the launch of Under Armour's icon flagship Sandton City store

A proud challenger brand

The brand lives in a very competitive space of sports brands. "We are a challenger brand, and we are comfortable with that. We are different from brands in this space, they are footwear brands, while we are a performance apparel brand across training, running, lifestyle, etc," says Collinicos.

"We are not just a training brand, we are a sportswear brand, and this store announces this," he adds.

The launch event was attended by some of the Under Armour-sponsored athletes, including Olympic swimming gold medallist and world record holder, Tatjana Smith (formerly Schoenmaker), soccer player, Kegan Johannes, and professional boxer, Kevin Lerena.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from VMts.

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