

What can Brand ANC learn from centenary brands?

 By [Thabani Khumalo](#)

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Recently, Africa's oldest liberation movement, the ANC celebrated 100 years. And what a remarkable century it has been for the ANC!



What Pixley ka Seme, John Dube, Sol Plaatje, chiefs and civil society organisations formed as a working-class movement in Bloemfontein on 8 January 1912 has turned into the world's greatest and celebrated political brand monument. When the ANC set out its vision for a non-racial and democratic South Africa, nobody knew that it would exist to become a celebrated centenary brand.

ANC, an incredible political brand

Since its inception, the ANC's brand has been well-fed and nurtured into the current progressive, embracing and powerful political brand.

Brands are about relationships, associations and promises made, and promises delivered. When it was launched, the ANC promised to spearhead the struggle for fundamental political, social and economic change, and the creation of a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society. The 1919 preamble of constitution, initially adopted in 1914, and the 1955's Freedom Charter became the ANC's selling points. Its grassroots-based programmes were used as a vehicle to ignite and transfer brand passion to the masses.

The ANC brand cut its teeth during the liberation struggle. And, today, it is celebrated as an incredible political brand, leader of the liberation struggle, custodian of democracy, champion of human rights, and an icon of peaceful negotiations, not only in Africa, but in the whole world.

ANC joining the tenth decade greats

Surviving and thriving as a brand for a century and beyond is an extraordinary and monumental achievement. Globalisation, economic downturns, shifts in clients' needs, changes in technology, changes in political ideologies and many other factors have spelled the death for many brands.

Yet there are tens of global brands that manage to remain young, dynamic and vital, well into their 10th decade and beyond. Think of giant brands such as Chevrolet, Kiwi polish, Coca-Cola, Jonnie Walker, Shell, Xerox, Guinness, Ford, Mercedes-Benz, IBM, Tata, HSBC, Levi's and a few more. Strong brands don't die and can withstand the test of time.

All these brands are more than a century old, yet they continue to dominate their landscapes today. They just thrive on a solid reputation built in the past and preserved for the future. What can the ANC learn from the 10th-decade greats?

What can keep the ANC brand big in the second century?

Centenarian brands have worth of enduring ideals and ideas that have withstood the test of time, and can defy current trends and extend their lifespans and influences into the second century. There is a lot that the ANC can learn from 10th-decade peers. However, the ANC faces a number of tough and bold decisions and actions as it enters the second century, and these include:

- **Valuing ANC heritage**

The ANC tradition can play a critical role in the organisation's growth because members make decisions based on what they know and what they have come to expect. The ANC's legacy and durability represent credibility, discipline, a proven track record, reliability, resistance, selflessness, character, shared experiences and patriotism.

So the challenge facing the ANC brand is to balance the powerful asset of longevity and legacy with the need to continually evolve to meet changing party responsibilities, members' demands, citizens' expectations and the dynamic initiatives and responses of competitors.

- **Embrace transformation and avoid ossification, complacency and rigidity**

Centenarian brands have correctly identified big consumer, technology, social and economic trends, and transformed themselves repeatedly to leverage these new realities. People's needs (and competitive sets of alternatives) evolve over time and so brands must evolve to keep pace, otherwise complacency and irrelevance set in and the brand may rot.

The ANC needs to continue building a brand identity that reflects and embraces the country's diversity, inclusive development, poverty eradication, entrepreneurial aspirations, sporting excellence, economic growth opportunities, empowerment of African masses and greater political stability.

Most importantly, Brand ANC needs to enter into its second century with youthful energy and intensity, and with no sign of old-age ailments, rigidity or fatigue.

ANC's veteran Pallo Jordan says that the ANC's capacity for introspection, self-criticism and grasping the nettle of corrective action when necessary, has ensured that the ANC remained relevant while other movements dithered, then withered: "The ANC's capacity to lead will depend on how it addresses the political, economic and societal changes its own policies and programmes have generated."

- **Trading on integrity and reputation**

The 10th-decade brands understand that reputable brands never takes their eye off their images and reputations, and that powerful brands are built through substantiation, consistency, responsible partnerships, quality products or services, excellent relations, and sound governance principles whose cornerstones are communications,

responsibility, respect, accountability, caring, reliability, trust, honesty, transparency and fairness.

The ANC needs to refresh and revitalise its iconic brand status in ways that continues to win admiration, praise, association and support, and ultimately retain its positive profile and reputation. The ANC brand needs to remain true to its pioneering spirit and its promise of selflessness, unity, freedom and honest leadership.

- **Embracing the need to be accessible and accommodating, yet remaining true to itself.**

While centenarian brands have transformed themselves, they have also remained true to their core, which helps build unshakeable franchise across generations.

One of the great ironies of the centenarian brands is that they are known by everybody and embraced by nearly all consumers. And yet they remain very clear about their audiences, mandates, aspirations and visions. Centenarian icons evolved, changed, challenged and amazed, but have remained always genuinely to their brands attributes.

ANC leaders and members need to understand that the legend of the ANC is a huge asset that they need to protect at all costs and nurture for the next generations.

- **Telling its powerful stories**

The ANC, like other centenarian brands, endured a rough ride and celebrated successes from its inceptions. To the ANC, these include ideological differences, leaders' honesty, members' loyalty, organisational discipline, ill-discipline, racial and ethnic diversity, splits, elitism, life in exile, backstabbing, sharing, detention without trial, infighting, assassinations, displacement, harassments and military raids by apartheid regime, incarceration and armed struggle.

Despite these experiences, the ANC has produced dedicated, discipline and passionate struggle icons who served the struggle without expecting material gains. These stories need to be told and transferred to ANC generations by none other than ANC veterans.

Therefore ANC veterans need to be valued and used as a vehicle for transferring ANC's tradition, culture, principles and values, and for nurturing its future leaders.

- **Managing itself as an institution**

Centenarian brands are much more than brands. A remarkable feature of centenarians is that many of them are not merely large and powerful brands, but institutions in themselves. Therefore, they tend to act like institutions do, which leads to their sustained longevity and success.

The ANC brand, like other centenarian brands needs to continue creating, enforcing, and applying policies, principles and values; inculcating a specific culture; developing its members and leaders into icons; running an efficient government; representing the interests and aspirations of its members and citizens; and having recognized structure of rules and procedures within which it operates.

Shaping its destiny beyond 100

Centenarian brands have endured because of their ability to inspire trust, move with the times and use their expertise to advantage. While the ANC brand has survived and thrived in the past, it is currently faced by daunting and haunting challenges of internal conflicts, government administration, political and economic changes, globalisation and political competition [*and don't forget the controversial [Protection of Information Bill](#) aka '[Secrecy Bill](#)' and its [various issues with the South African media](#) - managing ed].*

An urgent challenge facing the ANC brand is the need to continue to change in order to remain relevant, appealing,

competitive and productive; and retain its freshness and enticement while remaining true to the spirit and principles that propelled it to the current iconic status.

Can the ANC turn on its advantages - durability and legacy - to shape its destiny beyond 100 years? Can the ANC live and lead into the second century? It remains to be seen.

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