

Brand Oman Launch Speech HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki Al Said CEO, Oman Brand Management Unit

Your Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests

It gives me enormous pleasure to welcome you to this evening's launch of Brand Oman.

Defining the image of a country is no easy task and for the past two years my team and I, in partnership with over 50 organizations from Oman's public and private sectors, have been working on assessing Oman's qualities and getting to grips with how the sultanate is perceived within its own borders as well as overseas.

We are a relatively small country and generally little known. It is time, now, to consider what we have and define the unique qualities Oman has to offer – our compelling truths if you will – natural resources, beauty, minerals, culture, infrastructure, education, technology – and then showcase these for the global audience. In fact, I see tonight's new national brand mark launch, held under the patronage of His Highness Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, Minister of Heritage and Culture, as not the conclusion of our work but an important milestone on our journey in presenting Oman to the world – branding our glorious nation.

But what is Nation Branding exactly? Whether managed or not, every country already has a brand. In fact, over the past few years, as I am sure you are aware, more and more nations are launching branding campaigns via the web, print and television.

While a lot of countries have used straightforward advertising to try and change overall perceptions of who they are, many have been less than successful. What the Oman Brand Management Unit will encourage, particularly in tourism; business; ICT; and education is a more focused, organic, sustainable and co-ordinated approach to developing a stronger national brand. Getting all parties to unite through a common image and common identity. Indeed, I firmly believe the new brand mark will act as a catalyst in this regard, bringing the various stakeholders together and taking us forward successfully in partnership.

It is our role at the Oman Brand Management Unit to bring stakeholders together, work in unison and agree on what we want to contribute to the world. By doing this, we will have a stronger impact on how people perceive the Sultanate. Oman's national brand brings together and celebrates the wonderful diversity that is our country: its unique people, stories, culture, ideas, leadership and vision. It involves messages from dozens of sources, everything from our print media, TV news, local radio, road signage, postage stamps, trade show materials to our stance on complex issues like global warming and free trade agreements – they all give the world an indication of our identity, who we are and what we stand for.

This is certainly not an easy task, but it can and will be done. In this regard, we will use simple but powerful stories that give context to Oman, stories that are relevant to our visitors and ourselves. We will weave a compelling thread that binds the extraordinary and the ordinary that are Omani.

However, none of this is achievable without domestic approval and participation, the best nation branding campaign will not fly if it does not work for the home crowd. Nation branding does not happen in isolation it needs to involve all stakeholders, both internal and external and this is something we have been working on for several months. Indeed, we have already

introduced a Brand Ambassador Program, these are people who exemplify the brand of Oman in action; people who live and breathe the Sultanate's arts, culture, environment, entrepreneurship, learning, tourism, sports, business and ICT and who are highly ambitious for the development of Oman. In brief, they are the people who bring Oman's brand to life, the human interest and the good news stories.

Their responsibilities will include hosting events, leading delegations to interest target investors, handling media relations and speaking about Oman at conferences, seminars and trade shows. Being the face of Oman.

I hope tonight's brand mark launch will help us begin to bring Oman's citizens on board, people of all nationalities, make them feel proud about being part of the rich tapestry of the social landscape of the Sultanate. After all, you are our most formidable and valuable brand ambassadors.

When we talk about nation branding, it is also important to discuss the role that local firms and products play in helping shape the Oman's national identity. The world is changing rapidly and globalisation is often viewed simply as a quantitative expansion of markets, where more and more economies become part of the global marketplace. But the qualitative expansion of the marketplace under globalisation is just as important. Increasingly, identity and nationality have become market-related phenomena. In today's ever inter-connected world, culture, economics, business, sports, tourism, education and national identity are embedded in one another.

Companies and products have become brands which consumers use as identity-icons. In this regard, I believe Omani firms and goods play a critical role in identity construction both at the level of individuals and the nation.

As a part of globalisation, firms and products in themselves constitute a meeting point for international cultural exchange. It is not only our own identity that is created through brands, but how we recognise other cultures as well. For example, if I buy a BMW motorbike, I buy into the idea of high performance and innovative engineering. This is to say that firms, goods and brands have built-in significance and meaning; this is where consumers live out their experiences, dreams and identity. Products have become narratives, and narratives have become products. Today, global competition is not so much on price as on narratives and identity.

Before I conclude, I would like to take a few minutes to talk about the brand mark that we will reveal this evening.

Taking its inspiration from the wonderful diversity that is Oman – amongst other things, Arabic calligraphy; marine environment; local textiles; our magnificent landscape; the sultanate's historic leadership in trade and pioneering role in exploration; and of course frankincense, which has been at the core of our culture and economy for generations. This new and bold brand mark has been expertly crafted, and draws on a rich and vibrant colour palette which, we believe, reflects Oman's natural bounty.

The brand mark has evolved before arriving at the simplified graphic version that you will see tonight. Indeed, it has been tried and tested with both domestic and international audiences. From bankers, hoteliers, marketers, civil servants, marine biologists, tour guides, journalists, through to environmentalists and academics we've engaged a broad and culturally diverse

audience in our work and sort their thoughts, comments and feedback.

A logo is a thing: a concrete object. A national brand is not. A brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room - it is intangible and difficult to control, because it is not owned solely by you but everyone. It is the sum total of all the thoughts, feelings, impressions and experiences that people have when they come into contact with Oman. Oman's brand is what we do and who we are. A shift from blue to purple is not going to make up for an unfriendly reception at passport control or uncared for environment. Intelligent visual design is of course vital to what the Oman Brand Management Unit is about, but it cannot stand alone. If we want to make an impact in today's world then this will not be achieved just by a new colour scheme and creative graphics.

And after tonight, what's in store for the Oman Brand Management Unit? In partnership with our public and private sector supporters, we intend to help Oman tell its story, and offer the world a set of co-ordinates so that it can be mapped.

For 2009, we've set a program of creative initiatives that we hope will move Oman into the consciousness of the world. In brief, it's our job in partnership with our supporters to help create a new context for the world to view Oman in.

Last but certainly not least, I should like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Oman Brand Management Committee led by His Excellency Maqbool bin Ali Sultan, Minister of Commerce & Industry whose efforts have brought us to this point in our exciting journey that we embark on as one under the banner of Brand Oman.

There are so many people to thank who have already played and will continue to play a pivotal role in the Unit's work. In this regard, it is important to recognize Oman Oil, the Zubair Corporation, Oman Mobile, Oman Air, National Bank of Oman and Oman LNG.

I should also like to offer a word of thanks to all the government agencies as well as private individuals that have given of their energy and expertise in helping my team and I.

Finally, I should like to thank my team at the Oman Brand Management Unit who have done a sterling job.

Thank you.