

## Oman Launches New Brand Mark

Muscat – Changing the image of a country is no easier than changing the image of a company or an individual and for the past two years the Oman Brand Management Unit (OBMU), spearheaded by His Highness Sayyid Faisal bin Turki Al Said has 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’re a relatively small country and generally little known. Now is the time to identify what unique qualities Oman has to offer and balance this with what consumers actually want from us. Understand our compelling truth and look at what we have – natural resources, beauty, minerals, culture, infrastructure, education, technology – and then match these deliverables to what is really wanted from a global audience. In fact, I see Sunday night’s launch of the new national brand mark, held under the patronage of His Highness Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, Minister of Heritage and Culture, as just the beginning of this very important work,” says Sayyid Faisal.

But what is Nation Branding exactly? Whether managed or not, every country already has a brand. For example, when Finland is called to mind, scenes of long, cold winters and the midnight sun were most likely your immediate association a few years ago; now you’ll conjure up an image of a country leading the world in telecommunications. In fact, over the past few years we’ve seen various countries from across the world launch branding campaigns via the web, print and television.

While a lot of these countries have used straightforward advertising to try and change overall perceptions of who they are many have been less than successful. “What OBMU 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 look and sound alike, and I believe the new brand mark will act as a catalyst in this regard, bringing the various stakeholders together,” remarks Sayyid Faisal.

According to the OBMU CEO, Oman’s national brand revolves around 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.

“It’s OBMU’s role to bring stakeholders together, work in unison and agree on what we want to contribute to the world. By doing this, we’ll have a stronger impact on how people perceive the sultanate. This isn’t an easy task, but it can be done,” argues Sayyid Faisal. “In this regard” continues the OBMU CEO “we’ll be using simple but powerful stories that give context to Oman, stories that are relevant to our visitors and ourselves. We’ll weave a compelling thread that binds the extraordinary and the ordinary things that are Omani.”

Sayyid Faisal goes on to point that “none of this is achievable without domestic approval, the best nation branding campaign won’t fly if it doesn’t work for the home crowd. Nation branding doesn’t happen in isolation it needs to involve all stakeholders, both internal and external and this is something we’ve been working on for months. 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 the sultanate. After all, and whether they realize it or not, they're all brand ambassadors."

How does Sayyid Faisal see the connection between Omani firms, goods and nation branding? "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, Sayyid Faisal believes that 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, products in themselves constitute a meeting point for international cultural exchange. "It's not only our own identity that is created through brands, but how we recognise other cultures as well," suggests Sayyid Faisal. "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. Global competition is not so much on price as on narratives and identity."

Post brand mark launch, what's in store for Sayyid Faisal and his team? "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. We've a set of creative initiatives that we hope will move Oman into the consciousness of the world. In brief, it's our job to help create a new context for the world to view Oman in."