

Press Conference Speech 16 February HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki Al Said CEO, Oman Brand Management Unit

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this morning's first Oman Brand Management Unit press conference.

I'd like to begin by thanking my colleagues at the Ministry of Heritage & Culture for providing us with such a beautiful and impressive venue. On behalf of everyone at the Oman Brand Management Unit, your help in making today's event possible is much appreciated.

Oman has a rich history, boasts outstanding natural beauty and is recognized the world over as a warm, friendly and welcoming nation. Indeed, research has shown highly positive associations with the sultanate thanks, on the whole, to our highly successful and rapidly developing tourism industry. However, this strong brand equity is currently largely one-dimensional.

As many of you will be aware, there is a gap between perceptions of Oman as a great place to relax and holiday and the growing dynamism within the sultanate and the substantial commercial opportunities it offers the international business community.

Therefore, the challenge is to reposition the stereo-typical profile to better reflect Oman's thriving entrepreneurial spirit, inward investment opportunities, manufacturing and ICT successes and the sultanate's steadfast commitment to life-long education and training for all.

This repositioning will be tackled by presenting an umbrella brand image for Oman, supported by a long-term strategy for raising the profile of Oman's businesses, organizations, products and services. By presenting a unified approach and showcasing success stories in tourism, business, education and ICT, the Oman Brand Management Unit will be better positioned to promote Oman nationally and internationally as an ideal place to buy from, invest in and visit.

I believe that national identities consist of more than images, flags, logos and ceremonials, they are also shaped around compelling stories that make sense of where a nation has come from and where it is going. The storytelling challenge is as relevant to the future of companies as it is to the future of countries. National identities don't emerge from nature; people create them.

Indeed, since the beginning of time, stories have been the way we've communicated. Today, we might have the Internet, e-mail, text messaging, satellite TV, or video conferencing to make the transmission process easier, but stories are still the way we most easily assimilate and pass on knowledge, information and experiences.

When we connect with a story, we take on its message; we start to own it by adding to it and passing it on. For brands, in a more complex and pressured world where every country, region, company, service or product is trying to stand out from the crowd and shout louder for the attention of the customer base, a story can be like gold dust. This is why we're launching the Oman Brand Ambassador Program today.

The perceptions people have of Oman are critical to our ability to be recognized as a country in which to live, work, invest and visit. In this regard, it is imperative that we explore and understand perceptions of the sultanate and take immediate action to address our image and profile nationally and internationally. Launching the Oman Brand Ambassador Program will be instrumental in helping Oman correct misperceptions and present an accurate and informed national image – one that we can be justifiably proud of.

To promote Oman's best stories, twenty sector Brand Ambassadors have been recruited. Together, they will present the dynamic and attractive face of Oman. Some of those involved in the initiative are here today and will be happy to talk to you later about why they decided to get involved in the program and what they hope to contribute to such an important national project.

By sharing Oman's business, tourism, education, technology and cultural experiences the Brand Ambassadors will showcase Oman's distinctive characteristics. It's these stories that will help build a compelling and authentic brand story for Oman. Indeed, these brand stories are the foundation on which powerful and convincing nation branding awareness campaigns are built.

Throughout 2009, the Brand Ambassadors will tour the sultanate and present at schools, colleges, businesses and government organizations - promoting the quality, excellence and distinctiveness of the sultanate. They will be a significant resource in helping build Oman's credentials nationally and internationally. These are experienced and forward-thinking people that truly embody the spirit of Brand Oman.

In addition to the launch of the Oman Brand Ambassador Program I should also like to highlight that we will shortly be organizing a nationwide Brand Tour, calling in to the major towns and cities of Oman. The objective of the tour is to reach out to the people of Oman – and here I mean people of all nationalities – to explain the importance of nation branding, the role of the Oman Brand Management Unit, the story behind the brand mark, and perhaps more importantly, to show how each and everyone of us has a role to play in promoting the sultanate.

We are also in the process of finalizing a set of high profile initiatives with our partners in government and the private sector. Indeed, I intend to hold regular press conferences to keep everyone updated on our plans, activities and achievements. As they say, 'watch this space.'

Technology plays a pivotal role in what we do at OBMU. In this regard, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Mohammed Al Rasbi, Founder and CEO of R&D, formerly a start-up company in the Knowledge Mine Business Incubator program based at Knowledge Oasis Muscat – now a graduate of that program – who is responsible for brandoman.om – Indeed, he epitomizes Oman's new generation of talented entrepreneurs as well as the entrepreneurial spirit of the nation. Moreover, we're delighted to announce that he's one of the first batch of Oman Brand Ambassadors.

Mohammed will introduce the Brand Oman portal to you this morning – it's important to note that this is an ongoing project so over the coming months you will see our online presence mature. Mohammed.....

Thank you Mohammed...I'd now like to throw the floor open to questions.