



THEBE IKALAFENG

Founder and Chairman, Brand Africa | Founder and CEO, Brand Leadership Group
Chancellor, Sol Plaatje University

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A TRAILBLAZING ADVOCATE FOR A BRAND-LED AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

"The foremost branding authority in Africa" — New African Magazine

"Thebe is Africa" — TEDxGhana

"Africa's brand architect" — Journey Magazine

Thebe Ikalafeng is not merely a name in branding in Africa. He is a voice and a mirror through which Africa sees its worth, tells its story and reclaims its rightful place in the world.

He is an award-winning, Hall of Fame global African scholar and practitioner on branding, identity and economic sovereignty — a trailblazing advocate for a brand-led African renaissance devoted to reclaiming Africa's identity, reshaping its narrative and affirming its global influence.

His birthplace of Kimberley, a pioneering South African city defined by depth and resilience, his ancestral roots in Botswana, and a lifetime of crossing every border on the African continent and every continent have shaped his character and fuelled his purpose.

After graduating from Marquette University — where he received the American Marketing Association Award for Marketing Excellence in 1992 — he began his corporate journey at Colgate-Palmolive in New York, culminating as Chief Marketing Officer for Nike Africa in 2002, where he led the brand to number one across the continent and multiple global and African awards, including 10 Cannes Lions for marketing communications excellence.

In 2002, he founded Brand Leadership — an advisory firm operating at the intersection of strategy, creativity and intellectual property law, advising corporations, governments and institutions across Africa and globally to build purposeful, high-impact brands.

In 2010, he founded Brand Africa, the pan-African non-profit movement dedicated to inspiring a brand-led African renaissance. Its flagship initiative, Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands, is the

most cited study on brands in Africa and the definitive benchmark for measuring the continent's brand strength and economic sovereignty — conducted annually across 30+ markets representing over 80% of Africa's GDP and population.

Ikalafeng has served on private and public boards for more than 25 years, including the formerly JSE-listed Mercantile Bank (now part of Capitec), the Nasdaq-listed Cartrack, Foodcorp, South African Tourism as Deputy Chairperson, Brand South Africa and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) — reflecting his breadth of governance experience across commerce, destination and conservation.. He currently serves on the boards of PSI and the WWF Nedbank Green Trust.

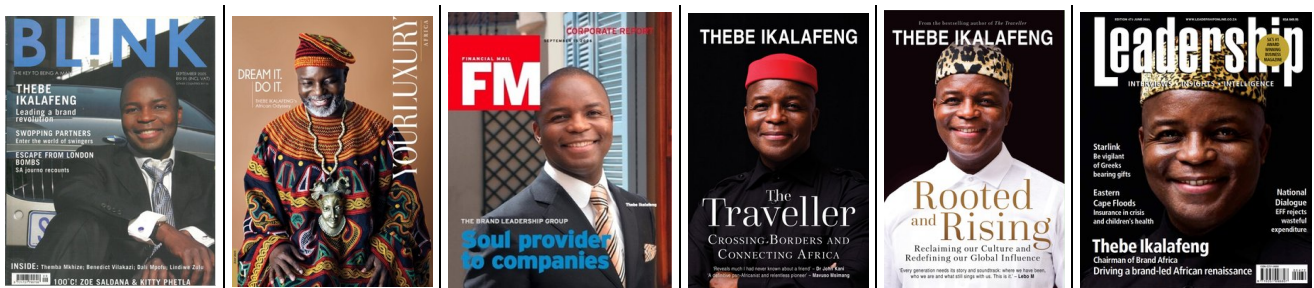
He is the second Chancellor of Sol Plaatje University, one of only two public universities established in democratic South Africa, located in Kimberley, the city of his birth.

Recognised globally, he has been named among the 100 Most Influential Africans (New African, 2013, 2015, 2024), the 100 Most Reputable Africans (Global Reputation Forum, 2023, 2025), and the 100 Most Influential People of African Descent (MIPAD/United Nations, 2022). He was awarded Lifetime Achievement Awards by Financial Mail (2021) and the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (2022), and has been conferred honorary doctorates by the University of South Africa and the University of Johannesburg.

His recent bestselling books — *The Traveller: Crossing Borders and Connecting Africa* and *Rooted and Rising: Reclaiming Our Culture and Redefining Our Global Influence* — chronicle his journey across geography, identity and belonging, and articulate a vision for the continent that is both deeply personal and profoundly pan-African.

An intrepid traveller across more than 125 countries, Ikalafeng has visited every country in Africa and every continent in the world, traversed the polar frontiers of Greenland and Antarctica, tracked silverback gorillas on the Virunga Mountains in Uganda and Rwanda, and summited Mounts Kilimanjaro, Sinai and Elbrus. For him, travel is not merely adventure — it is a quest to understand people, place and possibility.

Ikalafeng holds BSc and MBA degrees from Marquette University and a Master of Laws (LLM) in Intellectual Property from the University of Turin in collaboration with WIPO. He is a Chartered Marketer (SA) and a Fellow of the Institute of Directors, and completed executive education at Harvard Business School and Wits Business School.



www.ikalafeng.africa