



THEBE IKALAFENG

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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.

An award-winning, Hall of Fame global African marketer, scholar and trailblazing advocate for a brand-led African renaissance, he is devoted to reclaiming Africa's identity, reshaping its narrative and affirming its global influence. Born and raised in Kimberley, South Africa, and educated internationally, he works at the intersection of academia, advisory and continental advancement. In academia, he is Chancellor of Sol Plaatje University, one of only two public universities established in democratic South Africa; Founder and Principal of the Africa Brand Leadership Academy (ABLA), and Professor of Practice at the University of Johannesburg Business School [JBS]. In advisory, he leads the award-winning Brand Leadership Group which works at the intersection of branding, strategic communications and intellectual property. Continentally, he is the founder and chairman of Brand Africa.

After graduating from Marquette University in the United States, where he received the American Marketing Association Award for Marketing Excellence in 1992, he began his corporate career at Colgate-Palmolive in New York, culminating in 2002 as Chief Marketing Officer for Nike Africa, based in South Africa, where he led the brand to number one across the continent and to multiple global and African awards for marketing communications excellence, including Cannes Lions, Loeries, D&AD and One Show.

In 2002, he founded Brand Leadership, advising corporations, governments and institutions across Africa and globally to build purposeful and high-impact brands. Brand Leadership has won multiple awards and was inducted in the REBRAND Hall of Fame in New York for Effectiveness in Brand Transformations.

In 2010, he founded Brand Africa, the pan-African non-profit movement dedicated to inspiring a brand-led African renaissance. Brand Africa's flagship initiatives, Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands and Africa CMO 100, measure the brands and celebrate the people building Africa's reputation and standing. 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 more than 30 markets representing over 80% of Africa's GDP and population. Africa CMO 100 is the definitive annual listing of the 100 most influential African and diaspora chief marketing officers behind the most admired brands in Africa and the world.

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 as chairman of the Marketing Committee and the 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 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 has received Lifetime Achievement Awards from Financial Mail (2021) and the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (2022), and a Special Recognition award from EMY Africa in Ghana for his contribution to Africa (2023). In 2024 he was conferred with 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 commitment and 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 in Tanzania, Sinai in Egypt and Elbrus in Russia. 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.

He is a proud son of Kimberley, the pioneering city where South Africa's industrial age and modernity began with the 1871 diamond rush, Africa's first stock exchange in 1881, and the first electric street lighting in the Southern Hemisphere in 1882. That heritage, his ancestral roots in Botswana and South Africa, his international education, and a lifetime of movement across Africa and beyond have shaped his perspective and character, fuelled his purpose, and inspired his life's work.