

Durban's African melting pot

By Anice Hassim

LOOK, LET'S JUST come straight out and say it. Durban is an alluring, dusky, sweaty, African princess of cities. While certain sections of society may persist in lovingly polishing their faded memory beads of the 'Last Outpost of Empire' and 'Natal Fever', the reality is our city is a rude, bustling African metropolis.

People criticise us for being slow (as in special and as in well... slow), being poor, being hippy and casual - but what they don't get is that Durban has its own unique vibe that comes from being the only city that is a truly South African melting pot. Here Indian, Zulu and English fuse into a wild riot.

Durban's unique population composition also makes it ground zero for media and marketing in SA. This means that you have to have a message that resonates with all our residents. You can't ignore the tastes and opinions of any one of our three major population groups. When people understand that, success in Durban is easy.

For example, one of our most successful media owners, East Coast Radio built the bedrock of their success by figuring out how to retain their appeal to white and Indian markets, while being authentic enough to grow aggressively into the black market. Realities are very different now, but for brand owners in particular, it's worth noting that technology is wreaking havoc with traditional demographics.

The challenge for Durban businesses like ours is to turn our advantages into a beacon for talent from around the rest of the country. I know of three or four highly paid GPs who have made the move to the more relaxed, balanced lifestyle at the coast and many more who dream of it.

Unfortunately, the



Johannesburg centre of gravity often distorts reality. The usual story is that we in KZN are too laid-back, poor or whatever to get off our arse and enjoy the fine wares that we're being peddled.

"Durban can't even sell out Robbie Williams," groan the Gautengers. Well, the better answer is, "Durban didn't give a @#*% for Robbie Williams." Send us someone we like, however, and he/she will sell out. Durban is also the kind of place that receives a young lawyer who travels across the world for commercial reasons, but sends back The Mahatma. The freedoms and aspirations of people at home and billions more globally owe their inheritance to the transformative crucible that is Durban.

Big words for Durban, you might say. But that's how we roll. We get on with life (you know - the stuff that happens between traffic) and leave the chest thumping to the Gautengers (who want to impress their girlfriends) and Capies (who want to impress our former colonial overlords). We have spent a bit of time getting rid of the one lot and charming the other lot, so we aren't looking to go backwards.

For us, living and working in Durban is not a case of not being good enough for the big leagues - we do just fine, thank you! ◀

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