

# Behind the illusion

Ministry of illusion (MOI) was responsible for the animation, graphics, special effects and creative content for the event that amazed 200 million people across 200 countries at the final draw on Friday 4 December 2009.



The company's human capital investment in this "go down in history" project was an astounding 3177 hours with the 23-strong team living, eating and breathing FIFA World Cup fever for three months in the build-up to the go-live date.

"We were briefed to bring numerous elements to life that would be impossible without animation. These included taking the audience on a walk through Africa; telling the story of the world cup history; animating a soccer match using real animals and creating the illusion of a 3D image of mascot Zakumi," explained Gerd Müller, MD of Ministry of illusion.

"The brief also included showcasing all nine stadiums which included completing the digital construction of four of them, with the pinnacle being the footage of the match winning goal that leads each of the 32 countries to the 2010. Teams and coaches of most these countries were in the audience watching a digital creation of organic rock art revealing their draw against the competitor,"

## Scatterlings of Africa

"Our creative commission was to open the show by walking the audience through the continent. The MOI team spent many an hour propagating ideas and finally the decision was made to stroll side by side with Johnny Clegg strumming his guitar to the nations well loved favourite, "We are Scatterlings of Africa," says Müller.

Iconic scenes from various African countries were recreated using thousands of pictures and then filming Johnny Clegg walking on a treadmill against a green screen in studio. "We were then able to composite Johnny onto the 3D animated African background creating the illusion of him walking though Africa."

Johnny started his journey in Egypt with a pyramid and the sphinx as his backdrop, all recreated using 3D animation, from there he moved to an oasis in Libya, making his way down, through the forests of Kenya, passing Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, ending up at the Victoria Falls. At the opening event, Johnny seamlessly stepped out of the African background

and onto the stage to the ecstatic applause and cheers of the expectant crowd.

## **Zakumi lives**

Marios Nicolettis, Muller's co-founder and director of creative, was given the brief to enable Zakumi, the animated mascot, to interact live on stage with SABC's Carol Manana, the presenter of the show. It sounds simple enough but behind the scenes the MOI worked countless hours to make this happen. "It was incredibly challenging and it took many hours of rehearsals with Manana who was seen to be chatting away to an invisible character," said Nicolettis. At Friday's event, the seated audience did not actually see Zakumi on stage with Manana but his image was beamed onto massive screens where the live dialogue was played out seamlessly. "Zakumi doing soccer tricks is all the work of our tricks, the invisible made visible is what we do best." added Nicolettis.

## **Pages in time**

The final leg of the project was to create a walk through of the history of the World Cup. "To bring the subject to life, we decided to perform a typically African tradition: story telling between two generations," says Nicolettis. A giant book was created around which an African Makhulu retold his grandchildren the legend of the World Cup. Just one of the many magical moments in the video clip was the madala grandfather turning the book's pages, which spontaneously came to life. Photographs, pictures and postcards come to life and the images become real through the help of high-density visual effects.

## **Animals score**

A two-minute video production was another hit, where African animals came together on a soccer field in the bush.

"What made this very special was the fact that we used more than 15 animals filmed in their natural environment at different times and even managed to get a lion and a cheetah in action as they pawed the soccer ball," said Nicolettis.

Different shots made up the final footage all brought together to appear that all the animals were in the same place at the same time playing ball. Highlights included a dung beetle rolling the ball to team-mate ostrich that swallowed the ball as the audience applauded it travelling down its long neck. A cheeky monkey in the trees would either cover its eyes as the opposing team took possession of the ball, or cheering cheekily for their team. The production ends with a magnificent lioness that heads the 3D ball swiftly and powerfully into the back of the net scoring the winning goal for Africa as an enormous flock of birds dramatically scatter into the horizon.

"Being involved with FIFA as a preferred supplier has really shaped our business, we now know without a doubt that we can compete with the best internationally. It has also been a privilege to play a part, albeit a small one, in what is sure to be a page in our country's history," concludes Nicolettis.

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