

# Brand name... who decides?



By [Bonnie Ramaila](#)

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As tributes poured out for Ntate Maponya (Dr Richard Maponya) a few months ago - (pardon me I am going to call him Ntate Maponya... as I have always done when I was growing up in Dube - just out of respect!) - I couldn't help to think of the legacy he has left - that of his name Maponya. Then I asked myself a question... was it deliberate or it happened by chance? do people get into business to build a brand name or make money or make a difference in society?

Or is it the former two or all three?

Tough one, hey!



RIP Dr Richard Maponya

6 Jan 2020



Then, if it's the former two, then, when do you make that conscious decision that you are building a brand and making money? Or is a little bit of making a difference as long as I make money and the brand name will build itself in the process?

## The power of consumers

I was not aware then, but I believe people or consumers in this instance, are brand builders or personifies your brand (I will use these interchangeably, although I know they do not mean the same thing, but for the purpose of this article, it is in the context).

Do not underestimate the power of consumers.

I realised this aspect in retrospect, as I went through Ntate Maponya's life achievements and pondering on his name as a 'brand' – a Soweto brand.

As mentioned during his memorial service, Ntate Maponya started his business by selling grocers. And amongst one of his much sought after product in his then shop, he sold 'magwenya' (fat cakes) in Dube. We called them, 'magwenya a ga Maponya' - Maponya's fat cakes! (look at the name turning into a brand, associated with a specific product).



Nate Maponya (Dr Richard Maponya). Image source: Screengrab from [Youtube video](#).

Later in the years, the place in Dube where his shop was situated was called 'Ga-Maponya' - and mind you, he only rented the shop then - it was not even his site or place. As he grew his business interests, he bought Shoprite franchise – the first in Soweto, Dube - which we (consumers) called ko-Maponya... never have I heard anyone calling it Shoprite, it's always 'ko-Maponya' (sometimes I wondered if people noticed it was Shoprite, so much for the brand!).

Later, as other businesses mushroomed around the surrounding area of Shoprite, those places were called 'Maponya'. Even owners of garages, dry clean or franchises like Chicken Licken or Captain Dorego then, their businesses were termed 'Garage ya ko Maponya'; 'Chicken Licken ya ko Maponya' even when their businesses had names - (it doesn't get more specific than that!).

Ask any taxi or bus driver who shuttles people from Johannesburg to Zola/Emdeni passing through Dube, they know Maponya – a business precinct and taxi rank for people who commute to town from Soweto. And Nate Maponya didn't even own all those businesses around his Shoprite they call by his name. This is priceless!



What can we learn from the late Dr Richard Maponya?

21 Jan 2020



It can also be said with lots of places such as Sakies, Makhetha, Tshabalala, etc, I chose Maponya as its closer to home – literally!

Now, who decided that that place and any business that mushrooms around it be called Maponya? Yep, you guessed right... people who are consumers and commuters.

So, who makes brands? Marketers? Consumers? Advertisers? Park the thought!

## Consumers are a powerful force in brand building

Continuing on the Maponya name, Maponya Mall in Klipspruit/Pimville has done the same thing – every surrounding business around the mall is called 'ko-Maponya Mall'. I pity businesses that were there long before Maponya Mall was built, like Kenny's Brick and Tile – it's probably now called Kenny's Brick and Tile ya ko Maponya... I'm telling you... trust a consumer to muscle you out of your brand name any day!

Again, who makes brands? Consumers do. Think about it! Consumers are a powerful force in brand building.

Given this anecdote I have just shared, one can see the importance of consumers in brands. We don't start businesses to build a brand name – it is your consumers and customers that build your brand and decide the DNA of your brand as well. Let's face it; we go into business to make money. Period. Then later when one is well-off (ish), you then start thinking about the difference one can make in society, but it's never the objective of starting your business. And again, that difference you want to make is often dictated by your end-users attitude and relationship they have with your product or service.

I have realised that when we start 'businesses', most of the time what we set out to achieve, does not necessarily materialise as initially thought.

*“ Like Ntate Maponya, he merely started his business as a service to the community as an entrepreneur – but his name ended up being a brand name in Soweto. So this proves that with brands, it is the affiliation and relationship the target audience has with your brand that really gives your brand credence and likeability - thus, leading to brand affinity. ”*

**Who personifies a brand?** I believe very few brands need to embark on an expensive education drive to teach their target market about their brand DNA. Even when they do, they sometimes don't get it right, hence they employ Brand Ambassadors, who they believe have certain qualities similar to the DNA of the brand, in the hope of bringing the brand alive and give it some personality - especially when the brand seems not to be doing well in the market or efforts done through the communication, PR, and advertising seem to have come to a dead end.

Now, who personifies a brand? Consumers do.

So, don't go spending too much budget trying to feed consumers what you want them to believe, rather stick to brand values and benefits and wait! Then, communicate clearly, interact strategically, be positive and relevant, and adapt to the changing times, or else you'll find your brand as irrelevant as the former Kodak Film labs!

## ABOUT BONNIE RAMAILA

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