Moment of TRANSITION

How Postmaster General Dan Kagwe is transforming Posta from a past laden with rich history to a present that is largely defined by a mix of technological innovation

Waiting to exhale...
...a tale of Kenya’s film and TV industry
Page 21

Why leadership is a service
Page 31
Corporate Case Study

Intellectual Property: the future is bright for Africa

This year, the International Trademark Association (INTA) sent a delegation to Zimbabwe and South Africa as part of its efforts to build collaborations, develop relationships and increase cooperation with more governments across the continent and with organisations dealing with intellectual property (IP). CEO Etienne Sanz de Acedo speaks on the need to foster partnerships between Intellectual Property offices to encourage sharing of information and best practices.

The International Trademark Association (INTA) is the global association of trademark owners and professionals dedicated to supporting trademarks and related intellectual property (IP) in order to protect consumers and promote fair and effective commerce. There are more than 7,000 trademark owners, professionals and academics from more than 190 countries who benefit from the Association’s global trademark resources, policy development, education and training, and international network.

1. According to the World Economic Forum, African SMEs create 80 per cent of the continent’s jobs. How does INTA plan to engage with these...
businesses regarding trademarks and related matters?

Education around trademarks and related-IP is critical. This is especially the case among SMEs. Small business owners, focused on establishing and growing their businesses, often overlook the value in registering their trademarks early or in integrating trademarks into the brand strategy. In collaboration with local partners, and by building bridges with other stakeholders, such as national chambers of commerce, INTA looks to engage SMEs and to elevate the status of trademarks and IP within the local business communities. Indeed, this is good for business owners, their employees, and the economy.

What’s your forecast for trademarks and brands?

As with any region, in Africa there are many opportunities and challenges for trademarks and brands. However, the future is bright for Africa. It is fast becoming a key market for global brands. At the same time, many African brands are making their presence felt in international markets. These changes are reflected in the local economies. According to the African Economic Outlook 2016 report by the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, in 2015 the continent as a whole recorded real GDP growth at 3.6 per cent. This is compared with a global average of 3.1 per cent. Moreover, Africa is now the second-fastest-growing continental economy, after Asia. In 2016, six African countries were among the top-ten fastest-growing economies worldwide. At the same time, brand sentiment is improving and demand is surging among African consumers. The McKinsey Global Institute predicts that Africa’s consumer class will reach an estimated 1.1 billion consumers over the next five years, spending an estimated USD1.4 trillion on consumer products and services in 2020 alone. Positive demographic changes are also taking place across Africa. Today, about 56 per cent of the continent’s population work and support the other 44 per cent. By the year 2100, 65 per cent will be working and supporting 35 per cent. At the same time, by 2100, Africa’s current population of 1.2 billion is expected to grow to 5.6 billion. With this, we are seeing a continued rise of an educated, wealthier middle class. These changes present huge opportunities for brands, both domestic and foreign, for investment in Africa. There are also challenges. A key challenge is low awareness, both within the business communities and among consumers, about the role of trademarks in their businesses, their economies, and in their daily lives. As awareness of trademarks increases, businesses and consumers alike will see the benefits of strong IP systems, and partner in advocacy efforts.

Zimbabwe has been your first step in your Africa tour. According to the World International Property Organisation (WIPO) statistics, average resident trademark registrations in Zimbabwe between 2012 and 2015 were 270, compared with 1,740 non-resident registrations during the same period. Does this gap bother INTA?

These numbers show that first, there is strong interest among international brand owners in the Zimbabwean market and second, that more needs to be done to educate local business owners and brands about the value of intellectual property (IP) and the importance of registering trademarks. INTA is a global association with members in over 190 countries, including in Zimbabwe. In this regard, we strongly encourage the emergence of local business owners, support international brand owners looking to bring their business to Zimbabwe, and look to play a role in assisting the country develop its IP system, so local businesses can benefit from trademark protection, both domestically and internationally, attract foreign direct investments, and create jobs.

South Africa has a robust IP infrastructure. The government is currently revamping its IP policy and has invited input from various stakeholders. In the near future, INTA will ramp up its technical collaboration with strategic offices such as the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC), South African Revenue Service (SARS), and Customs. We also look forward to expanding our public awareness initiative, the Unreal Campaign, in South Africa. The campaign targets the younger generations with a focus on the negative impact of counterfeiting.

Africa is represented by just one member in INTA’s board of directors, Brenda Kahari from Zimbabwe. Does INTA have a plan to increase Africa’s representation in this board as well as INTA’s committees?

INTA would like to enhance Africa’s representation throughout its leadership structure. INTA members serving on its Board and on the various committees are volunteers, and we encourage more members from Africa to join committees and climb the leadership ladder to the Board.

Email: fmbuimwe@gmail.com