

Global ad agency sells Zim associate for US\$1

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#)

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Global marketing and advertising agency Young & Rubicam (Y&R) said this week it had finally sold its 25% stake in Zimbabwean associate Imago Young & Rubicam (Imago Y&R) for a mere US\$1 after its involvement in a re-election campaign for President Robert Mugabe.

The entire stake was taken up by Sharon Mugabe, who already held 75% of the advertising agency, one of the biggest in Zimbabwe.

The price underlined the desperation with which Y&R wanted to exit the operation to avoid an international outcry over its association with Mugabe through the Zimbabwean subsidiary.

The Y&R pull-out from Imago Y&R automatically deprived the Zimbabwean of the privilege of being part of wide network of Young & Rubicam, which is part of an international public relations and marketing brand, WPP.

Y&R's spokesman, Richard Oldworth confirmed to the UK press that Imago Y&R had agreed to re-brand by dropping any reference to its association with Y&R.

Sharon Mugabe was not in the office when contacted this week, with an official indicating she was in South Africa. There was a possibility she was scouting for a strategic partner from South Africa before implementing the re-branding exercise.

However, fears were that the group, which owns an advertising unit, Imago Y&R, Network Public Relations, Wunderman Action Marketing, a production unit, Ducks in a Row and Brand Value was unlikely to find buyers due to the current political situation in the country.

Imago Y&R, formerly Michel Hogg Young & Rubicam, was sold to Sharon Mugabe by veteran marketing guru, Michael Hogg in 2005 after a failed bid by Gary Thompson's agency, Gary Thompson & Associates. It marked one of the biggest empowerment transactions in the sector. Sharon Mugabe is unrelated to the Zimbabwean head of state, currently embroiled in a legitimacy crisis after disputes to his re-election on June 27, 2008.

ZANU-PF's recruitment of Imago Y&R came after Mugabe failed to engage the Bell Pottinger Group.

The MDC, however, managed to secure the services of Fleishman-Hillard, one of the world's largest PR firms with offices in the United States, London and Johannesburg.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

Dumisani Ndlela is a Zimbabwean journalist specialising in business and financial reporting, with experience reporting on commodities, stock and financial markets, advertising, marketing and the media. He has previously reported from a number of regional countries as well as from the UK and Germany on commodities and regional integration. He can be contacted on dndlela@yahoo.co.uk.

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