

## The great southern brand

By Simon Canning  
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IT has been more than two decades since the world saw Australia through the eyes of a singlet-wearing former bridge painter with a penchant for throwing shrimps on the barbie.

Thanks to the efforts of Paul Hogan, Australia was seen as an unsophisticated corner of the world boasting big rocks, an iconic opera house and intriguing wildlife. It was seen more as a place to visit and look at than a country to experience and savour.

Last night Hogan and his ubiquitous - and hugely successful - shrimp were at last laid to rest as a risky new \$360million Australian Tourism Commission campaign was launched, labelled Brand Australia. Federal Tourism Minister Joe Hockey says the campaign is a bid to change the perception of Australia here and overseas from a mere collection of attractions for travellers to a more rounded sensory experience.

Hockey admits Brand Australia is a big gamble, designed to not only cast how the world views the island nation but also to redefine the way Australians see themselves.

"We are trying to tell a story about Australia," Hockey says. "It's not a pretentious story. We have got real people telling real stories about the real Australia."

The new line for Australia is "A different light" - a reference to the unique quality of Australia's light - and six television commercials destined to be seen in Australia and overseas are at its heart. Icons such as Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef are missing entirely from the Australian portion of the campaign, and used only sparingly in the markets that will see the advertisements, the US, the UK and western Europe.

Instead, singer Delta Goodrem sings of the colours of Australia, inviting tourists to "Sing a rainbow with me". Poet Les Murray muses of the land where people "wear shorts forever", while former Australian and now UK TV personality Jonathan Coleman travels the nation in a foodie fantasy ranging from Tasmanian oysters to meat pies. Indigenous artist Barbara Weir talks of the atmosphere and freedom of Australia before revealing the words are not those of the Dreamtime but of "This old fella, D.H. Lawrence".

In perhaps the most amusing ad in the campaign, cricket commentator Richie Benaud says in his trademark manner: "What a marvellous day here. Perfect conditions." He then launches on a tour of Australia, offering his observations of "Marvellous" and "Great shot, that".

In the final ad in the series, Michael Parkinson lends his voice to the Brett Whiteley painting The Jacaranda Tree (on Sydney Harbour) which is brought to life with animation.

The move to take Australia's image beyond the shrimp on the barbie was first floated almost a decade ago by then Australian Tourist Commission chief executive John Morse. Morse, who now heads Tourism Victoria, says it took the 2000 Sydney Olympics to give Australians the self-confidence to take the next step. He says times have changed since the days Hogan could spruik a nation.

"[The Paul Hogan] era had a very positive hangover in the sense people saw Australia and Australians as very warm and friendly," Morse says. "That was not a negative, it was a positive. But it had to be built on because it was not enough. In all the research and all my experience overseas, where Australia was in the eyes of the world was a sort of mono, one-dimensional view of Australia and it really centred around friendly people.

"The world is looking for one thing that Australia has in abundance and that is authenticity. We are in the era of no nonsense. People want truth, they want reality."

The process to create a fresh national and international campaign did not begin until August last year, when New York-based branding expert Brand Architecture International was invited by the ATC to investigate what was wrong with Australian tourism and where it should go.

The company's managing director Lindsey Evans decided to go beyond the usual tourism industry suspects and gleaned views from Sydney Olympics organisers, winemakers, clothing manufacturers, sporting groups and those in the arts. What emerged was the feeling that Australia had become fragmented as a brand and that the simplistic tourism messages of the past - messages that in their day had nevertheless been spectacularly successful - could no longer address the needs of a growingly sophisticated tourism market. It found that post-Olympics and in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, SARS and two wars, Australia had become lost and only a bold and decisive change of direction would work.

Another clear finding of the research was that the icons traditionally trotted out to anchor Australian advertising campaigns overseas had become overused and cliched. The researchers began to paint a picture that the future of marketing Australia would be about the character and essence of the nation and its people rather than merely its sights.

"We have done Ayers Rock [Uluru] and we have done the Barrier Reef to the nth degree, and I think what we are doing is [showing] Australia in a way that is emotional about the way people think and the way people act," says Scott Whybin, founder of the agency behind the Brand Australia campaign, Whybin TBWA.

"It's almost as if the world is in a 10 per cent shift down here. There is a 10 per cent shift from the real world, so it is not of the real world. So we tried to make sure that people felt there was something magical happening down here," Whybin says.

Those sought out for their views came to the conclusion that the campaign had the opportunity to reshape Australia's reputation well beyond tourism and into other sectors, from wine to commerce, education and the arts.

"I think to get up above the capital T of tourism and brand a nation is a spectacular move forward. I think it's probably Australia expressing its confidence a little bit," says former Olympic marketing manager John Moore, who contributed to the research.

His Olympic colleague Morse agrees, saying the influence of the Sydney Games cannot be overstated, particularly the opening ceremony, when it came to offering up Australia as a total branding package.

"It's a really interesting thought that the Olympics and the way the world saw Australia allowed us to go to where we are now," Morse says. "If you look at the opening ceremony and specifically at the Aboriginal segment, for a brief moment 18million Australians were incredibly proud of Aboriginal culture. It has allowed us to be aware of who we are and what we are as a country. I keep saying to people, it's not sophistication, it's Australian style, because it's different to everywhere else."

Wine Export Council chief executive David Dean says the lessons learned and experience gained from marketing Australian wine to the world should be adopted more broadly in trying to brand the country.

"It was not so much what was wrong, but we've got to a state where we weren't providing the excitement factor," he says.

Just as Australian wine actively sought to ensure it didn't compare itself with the product of other countries, so too should Australia revel in its origins. "We don't compare ourselves with

France or Italy," Dean says. "We try to place the Australian wine as a unique product in its own right. So the things that we felt were important was to reinforce this message that Australia is unique."

As the image of Hogan, the larrikin who put Australia on the minds of Americans and drove inbound tourist numbers above 1 million people per year in the '80s, is quietly consigned to the dustbin of history, a new image of Australia dawns. But Hockey remains aware of the effect of a simple invitation to a barbecue.

"Hoges was telling a story that people wanted to believe. To talk about shrimps and wearing shorts on top of the Harbour Bridge," Hockey says. "But we're beyond that. It was a great campaign in its time but now we don't have one face. We have many people telling many stories, showing Australia in a different light."