

Global ad agency dumping Zim firm over Mugabe campaign?

By [Dumisani Ndelela](#)

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Global marketing and advertising agency Young & Rubicam (Y&R) is to sell its stake in Zimbabwean associate Imago Young & Rubicam (Imago Y&R) after the Zimbabwean agency's involvement in an election campaign for President Robert Mugabe.

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.

Britain's *Sunday Times* reported on Sunday, June 22, 2008 that Y&R, with a 25% stake in Imago Y&R, had begun the process of selling its stake in the Zimbabwean associate. The move comes after the agency was recruited to run the ZANU PF leader's re-election bid in the now-aborted June 27 runoff.

"Bernard Barnett, a Y&R corporate vice-president in London, told the *Sunday Times* that, following a tip-off, Sharon Mugabe was asked this week whether her company was the "professional media outfit" called in by Mugabe's advisers after the last elections," The paper reported.

It wrote, quoting Barnett, "We asked her if it was true - that they had been working for Zanu PF - and she said she personally was one of the president's communications advisers. It was a very unpleasant surprise. Neither she nor the agency should be working for a regime like that, and especially not campaigning for them."

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.

The MDC's adverts were banned from the state-controlled newspapers and broadcaster, leaving Tsvangirai's campaign with very limited outlets in the privately owned newspapers, which have far lower circulation than the state-run newspapers.

In some of the campaigns created by Imago Y&R, ZANU PF quotes the late 2pac Shakur singing "Proud to be black but why do we act like we don't love ourselves" and then puts an inscription below: "We need to break from dependence on the West. We as a nation need to determine our destiny. Vote with the future in mind".

The MDC has been hitting back, quoting the same artistes.

In one of its advertisements titled, *Words of Wisdom from their own revolutionary*, the MDC quotes 2pac Shakur saying: "Change, ... I guess change is good for any of us, whatever it takes for me and you all...to get up off the 'hood'..."

The MDC's campaign is predicated around the issue of "change you can trust".

Should Y&R pull out of Imago Y&R, the Zimbabwean firm will lose the privilege of being part of wide network of Young & Rubicam, which is part of an international public relations and marketing brand, WPP.

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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