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Brief Description: The annual report for the Technology and Human Resources for Industry Programme (THRIP), fulfills both a legal and a marketing function for this business unit which operates within the National Research Foundation (NRF). This year, for the first time ever, the report combined traditional full colour print and electronic formats to create a product that reflected the innovative, effective and highly successful nature of THRIP's activities.

NEED/OPPORTUNITY

THRIP is a research and development initiative funded by the Department of Trade and Industry, which challenges industries to match government funding for research projects in various fields. As such it operates on a very lean budget and, apart from basic administration, the annual report is one of few projects to which budget is allocated each year.

Besides communicating the annual financial statements of THRIP, the report provides an ideal opportunity to market the unit and its activities to all its stakeholders, programme participants, as well as industry and academia in South Africa. It meets the need to give public recognition to outstanding achievers within the programme.

This year, the report was used to underscore the unit's use of technology in all aspects of its operations, and to encourage all programme participants to adopt electronic communication mediums in their work. It also provided the opportunity to celebrate THRIP's 10th anniversary.

INTENDED AUDIENCE(S)

The annual report has a broad intended audience:

- all grant holders (researchers who have received funding from the programme in the year);
- the Department of Trade and Industry – a major government funder;
- industry partners (who provide funding and who ultimately benefit from the research done);
- the board members of THRIP and the NRF – administrator of the programme;
- governing bodies/representatives of certain sectors of industry (eg, science councils, industry organisations and institutes);

- higher education institutions; and
- students of science, technology and engineering (to a lesser degree).

All are drawn from a database which has been built up by THRIP over the years. Although the age of researchers and their fields of research vary widely, this is a sophisticated, well-educated audience, most of whom are involved with, or have an interest in, scientific research. Nevertheless, past experience and interaction with this audience has shown that many are either not completely comfortable or familiar with electronic methods of communication. Some also have limited access to it.

The latter is particularly true for programme participants from Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) and Black Empowerment Enterprises (BEEs) – both of which are top funding priorities for THRIP.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES

The 2001/2002 annual report had the following objectives:

- to provide a clear, simple financial overview for the period in question;
- to highlight the achievements and growth of the programme in the 10 years of its existence ;
- to clearly communicate the mission, objectives, and workings of THRIP as a whole;
- to clearly communicate growth and success of the programme in relation to the above;
- to highlight and promote the unique “win-win” relationship that THRIP fosters between government, industry and academia;
- to provide interesting and easily accessible information on some of the specific research projects, communicated in such a way as to be relevant and of interest to all THRIP stakeholders, regardless of their area of research;
- to encourage industry players who are NOT part of THRIP, to become involved by providing funding;
- to promote national pride and position southern Africa as the driving force behind the development of Africa’s scientific community – one which, in certain areas, is already on a par with international research facilities; and
- to give formal recognition to outstanding achievers, both individuals and projects as a whole.

Another important goal for the THRIP team was to emphasise to stakeholders that the programme not only provides funding to technology-based research, but that it is technology-driven, and therefore constantly strives to operate and communicate in ways which are fast, efficient, and cost-effective.

The brief provided to the publishers was that the report should convey how THRIP is using technology to aid South Africa’s development in all aspects; how hi-tech research can be combined with grass-roots development to create a better life, stronger economy, and more competitive industry.

SOLUTION OVERVIEW

The technology-driven theme suggested in the brief made an electronic format a logical choice. The first option was to present the information in the form of a website, which could be accessed via the NRF's existing home page.

However, on its own, this did not take into account the large portion of the audience who either had limited access to, or familiarity with, this technology. It was therefore decided to create an electronic report which could function as a website, but which could also be given an animated introduction and then cut to CD.

To ensure that this information would be accessed by the maximum number of readers, these CDs were fixed to the inside of the fold-out cover of a 36-page printed booklet. This full-colour booklet contained tightly edited "teaser" articles, with just enough detail to entice readers to turn to the CD or website for more information.

With the exception of certain financial information which was repeated in full on both printed and electronic formats, there is little repetition between the CD and booklet. In terms of content and look, the two formats are perfectly complementary, and neither is designed to stand alone.

The mini-CD provides in-depth coverage of the programme's priorities and objectives, as well as full-length articles on its research successes for the year. The booklet offers quick access and easy reference to essential financial and statistical information, with short, sharp "previews" linked to the information on the CD. The complementary nature of the separate sets of information means that both are useful and neither can be discarded. The choice of stock, (uncoated environmentally-friendly) represents the grass-roots, environmentally responsible aspect of the THRIP programme; the mini-CD represents the use and skill of technology and innovation; and the bright, fresh design reflects the creativity and energy of THRIP.

The final product demonstrates how seemingly disparate formats can work together to create a high-impact, effective piece of communication. It also put paid to the myth that one medium of communication will dominate or annihilate another (such as print).

The annual report was supported by a number of other activities. These were:

- the creation of a special competition for THRIP researchers, in which projects were submitted and evaluated according to certain outputs (eg, patents or products developed as a result of the research; projects with most job creation potential; projects with most export potential; etc.) Entries were narrowed down to 20 finalists. These projects were then investigated and used as features in the annual report;
- finalists were invited to a special awards function hosted by THRIP, at which the annual report was officially handed over to the Minister of Trade and Industry;
- material generated for the annual report was adapted into a special supplement printed by the Mail & Guardian, an independent national weekly newspaper, which was handed out on the night of the awards ceremony and distributed as part of the main body of the newspaper, in the following week; and

- posters and a large-format banner following the visual theme of the report, were produced for display at the awards ceremony.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

All content planning, copy generation, visual execution and production were handled by the external publisher. Total budget for the annual report was R153 000. This included all aspects of the printed and electronic annual report, but not the awards function itself, which was handled separately by THRIP. The Mail & Guardian supplement was funded exclusively through advertising.

From initial briefing through to printed delivery, production took 10 weeks, including all research, interviewing, writing and delivery to client. The bulk of the work was done by four people – two writers/project managers, one designer, and one html operator.

Time proved to be the biggest challenge, as the concept of using a competition as the source of feature material for the report, was only conceived in March. The THRIP team had limited time to collate and evaluate entries, and to decide on the finalists. This was achieved by relying primarily on electronic and fax communications.

The same method was used for interviewing, writing and approving of copy for the report. This had to be coordinated with researchers across the country, many of whom were hard to get hold of because university holidays (or sabbaticals) coincided with the production schedule.

All final proofs – of both electronic and printed versions – had to be approved by all THRIP and NRF board members (23 people), as well as the THRIP administration team (nine people).

Meticulous project management was required to ensure that the electronic version was completed and cut to CD before printing was complete, to allow enough time for the inserting of CDs into the printed booklet. At the same time, the website version had to go live at 17:00 on the day of the awards function. This was all successfully achieved.

MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES

The initial success of the report is evidenced by an unprecedented demand for additional copies by the recipient industry partners, councils and other representatives. The initial production of 3000 copies was followed two months later, by the production of an additional 3 000 copies. This demand had not been experienced in the 10 years of the programme's existence.

Less than five months after the report was distributed, industry funds committed for 2003 had reached – and surpassed – the previous year's level. During this time, R175 million was committed by industry, compared to R165 million raised in the previous entire 12-month period. As the sole marketing document for THRIP, the annual report can take most of the credit for this increase.

The growing awareness of the programme and its objectives and priorities has also resulted in the following:

- a dramatic growth in funding to technikon-based projects (R27 million, compared to R13 million in the previous year). This also implies that a growing proportion of applications for funding comes from this sector;
- an increase in funding to previously disadvantaged participants (R6 million up from R5 million in the previous year); and
- an increase in funding to SMMEs (R54 million up from R47 million in the previous year).