



Dr Jacco Dry – a corporate executive with a keen interest in conservation and an investment portfolio in game.

PROTECTING YOUR BRAND

by Dr Jacco Dry



Photos courtesy of Thaba Tholo. Thaba Tholo is widely acknowledged to be one of the most trusted brands in the industry.

The use of Thaba Tholo's images serves to highlight best practice and is in no way to be linked to instances of poor corporate governance highlighted in this article.

There have been several articles published over the past few months relating to mitigating unnecessary risk and not taking emotional decisions when buying or selling game, as well as how the economy and adverse weather have had and will have an impact on future game sales, and so forth. However, very little has been said about how to protect your brand – and let's be clear, it is your business name and, in many cases, your own name that is linked to that brand. A particular area that is often neglected is corporate governance and, related to this, reputational impact. One would argue that reputational impact is obvious and clear, and corporate governance is relevant only to big corporations and multinationals.



Sable antelope (*Hippotragus niger*) breeding bull, 'Tilman'.
Photo courtesy Thaba Tholo.
Scan the QR code or visit <https://vimeo.com/179009034> to watch the video: 'Tilman'. Published by Thaba Tholo.

This is where things can very often go horribly wrong. It might be true that big corporations and multinationals have proportionally much larger exposure to these types of risk events. They are also more likely to survive such events. In many cases, in smaller organisations or businesses, a single decision can cause an event from which such a business cannot recover.



To put this in context, a simple internet search reveals that nearly all European and American-based operations offering hunting safaris have some reference to ethical hunting (and the definition thereof) on their websites. Compared to this, hardly any of the sampled South African-based operations even refer to where they get their stock from, let alone promote ethical hunting or sustainability.

The point here is not to debate the definition of these terms, but rather to point to a mind-set that needs to change. Consider your target audience. If you are targeting overseas hunters from Europe,

ensure that they review material on several aspects of the proposed trip. Take rural Britain as an example. Deer are allowed to freely roam the countryside, even in areas where commercial farming activities take place. Hedges are common and the relatively free roaming of these animals is permitted in continuous green belts. Again, it is irrelevant whether this is the right approach or not – it simply points to a custom that is communicated to a potential client.

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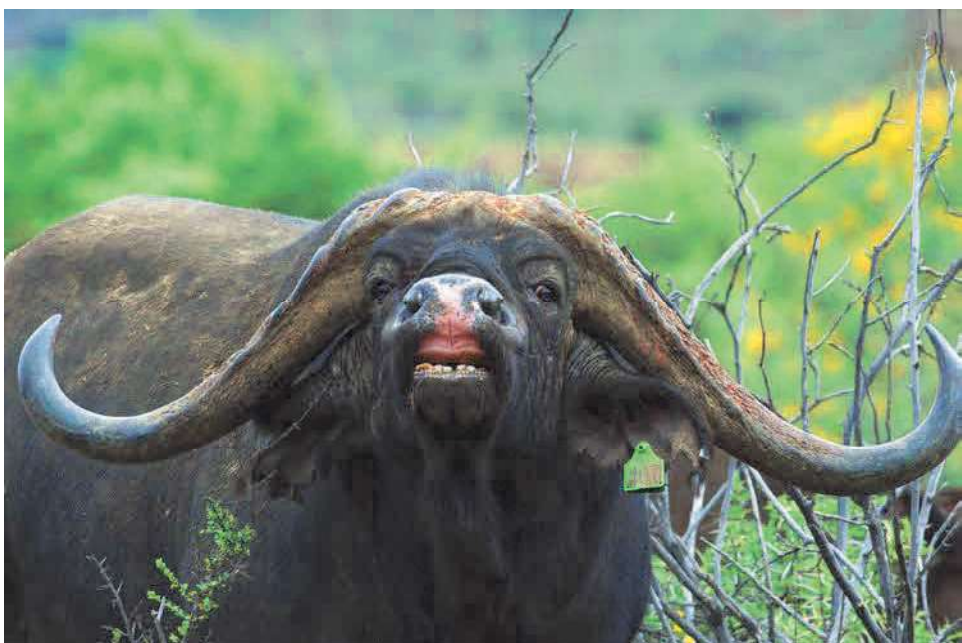
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR INDUSTRY PLAYERS IN SOUTH AFRICA?

The traditional and more common format that is typically employed by auction houses is to publish results on auctions by noting the species, the number of animals sold, the average price per head and the highest price per head achieved. Unfortunately, the traditional format is limited to reporting only on the animals that have been sold and does not give an indication of number of animals not sold at auction. As the reporting format is a common approach and not based on any strict guidelines, it can be deviated from or simply misused.

These auction houses included the names of contributing auctioneers and breeders. These entities are now assumed to be involved by association.

I will present two examples to illustrate this point.

1. The first example is based on an auction house specialising in so-called genetically superior game animals and the manner in which this auction house opted to publish the results of an auction. It chose not to follow the traditional or more common approach, but opted to publish the total cost of a particular lot, deviating from the cost-per-head principle. Now this might not be illegal, and no-one is suggesting that innovation should not occur. But as there was no explanation given as to why this deviation occurred, it simply appeared that the auction house was trying to create the perception of higher prices and hide the number of animals sold.



▲ African buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) breeding bull, 'Grootbaas' ('Mystery Bull' was renamed 'Grootbaas' following the acquisition).
Photo courtesy L'Ormarins Farms.



Sold in 2016
R168million

African buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) breeding bull, 'iNala'.

Photo courtesy Thaba Tholo.

Scan the QR code or visit <https://vimeo.com/179019360> to watch the video: 'iNala'. Published by Thaba Tholo.



Professional auctioneer, Brandon Leer, auctioning 'iNala'.

Brandon Leer's brand is another trusted and highly reputable one in the industry.

Photo © Quintus Strauss



2. A second example was found in a press release for another auction house. The press release contained clauses such as "...we will accept a minimum basic value of R40 000 for..." and "...as your genetic qualities, body structure and horn length improve, so does the quality of the trophy and the price of the breeding female. The same principles apply to the quality of the breeding males..." as well as "...silent auction that runs concurrent ...". Again, this might not be intentional or illegal in the local market; but in Europe, this type of language is deemed illegal when used by competitors or even associations such as trade or manufacturers' associations. It is considered to be collusion. (In this case, a popular view would include an auction house under the same umbrella as a trade association.)



▲ Eastern black rhino
(*Diceros bicornis ssp. michaeli*).
Photo © Meldt van der Spuy

A European client doing its 'due diligence' could easily misinterpret this information and therefore avoid such a business or operation. Furthermore, these auction houses included the names of contributing auctioneers and breeders. These entities are now assumed to be involved by association. Even if the entity does not endorse this type of activity, it thinks that by simply keeping quiet it will be exempt from the association. On the contrary, not explicitly rejecting same, the entity will be assumed to be complicit by default.

It is therefore clear that protecting one's brand should be considered in all activities. This includes thinking carefully about who you allow your name or brand to be associated with. Making clear

statements on your position, or the position of your business, in widely accessible media such as publications and on websites is imperative – and be prepared to back this up with evidence. It is not impossible for prospective clients to ask for proof. Considering the



BRAND SUCCESS STORY

A most celebrated brand in the wildlife sector in Africa, Thaba Tholo sells the majority of its excess game at an annual auction and prides itself on its long history of selling quality animals to satisfied customers. During February and March 2017, a founder population of Eastern black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis ssp. michaeli*), was carefully selected and captured as part of the Thaba Tholo and African Parks initiative to return Eastern black rhinos to Rwanda.

Scan the QR code or visit <https://vimeo.com/179034087> to watch the video: 'About Thaba Tholo'. Published by Thaba Tholo.



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WE BREED TRUST



pressure that the industry is under at this point in time, a relatively small incident could be the end of a lifetime of work.

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