



Allen Adamson, Contributor

Allen Adamson is Chairman, North America of Landor Associates, which specializes in creating agile brands that thrive in today's disruptive, changing marketplace. He has authored three books on the impact of business, culture and world events on brands. He and his family travelled incognito with Micato in East Africa.

In the Wilds of Africa, A Lesson in Simple, Brilliant Brand Execution

I've just returned from a safari in Kenya with my family. Our travel experience was, in all respects, the real deal. Certainly it was the real deal in terms of a genuine wild-life experience. But more than that, it was the real deal in terms of what makes for a superior brand experience.

I have always talked, lectured and counseled clients about how critical it is for a simple brand idea to drive differentiation within a category, differentiation being essential to success. Recently, I've talked more and more about the need for powerful execution of this brand idea. The best idea is worthless unless it is executed brilliantly at every touchpoint. Of course, these are both really easy concepts to understand, but incredibly difficult on which to deliver. This is especially true in a marketplace run increasingly more rampant with brands and branding signals. When it happens, you know it. Relative to my recent travels, I knew it, not just as a branding professional, but as another of the customers.

Micato Safaris has been named World's Best Tour Operator and Safari Outfitter nine times by *Travel+Leisure Magazine*. It has earned similar kudos from *National Geographic Traveler*, and a myriad of other travel resources. This is with good reason, actually, both the reasons stated above. Founded by Jane and Felix Pinto in 1966, the simple idea that drives Micato's differentiation is, in essence, the family touch. All high-end tour operators promote luxury, the quality of the food and accommodations, the number of tours and the ratio of guides to clients. All the "whats" of the brand experience. **The notion of a "family" approach, being treated as if you were the family's guest in their country is, at once, a very simple idea, and the very idea that sets Micato apart from its competitors.**

That they deliver on this idea is an understatement. For starters, guests are invited to the Pinto's home in Nairobi for a welcome meal soon after arriving in Kenya. We're not meant to feel like tourists, but family visiting from another country. The arrival experience sets your expectations high, and these expectations are met at every successive point of the experience. Each employee can deliver as expected, not as the result of being told to treat clients "nicely," but because they understand the brand idea—treat people like family. The idea is a game changer in the category. It provides a sharp, laser focus for how to deliver the brand. Each and every person associated



with Micato knows what they need to do without a 200-page employee manual to direct them. From the moment you step off the plane, to the little gifts that appear on your pillow each evening, from the friendliness of the expert guides who explain the difference between a cheetah and leopard, to the anticipation of all the details that will make your trip stress-free, it all happens just as, well, expected. We saw the lions and elephants and giraffes. We enjoyed the luxurious accommodations, the first-class food and transportation. But what set it all apart was the experience of being treated like family.

The starting point for all great brands has always been the ability to identify a point of difference that is meaningful to people. This said, if a brand doesn't live its promise day after day, nothing else will matter. In a skeptical, word-of-mouth world, this is a critical factor in achieving brand success. Even with the prevalence of sophisticated tools and strategies designed to measure customer satisfaction, the most accurate measure of whether a customer is happy or not can be answered with one question: "Would you recommend this product or service to a friend?"

Micato serves more than 5,000 clients a year. People, like me, come back and talk about their experience with the brand because it is different, in a way that is genuinely meaningful. **The Pintos have deep love for their country and they want to share their appreciation. This was, and continues to be, the idea on which Micato is based, and on which it delivers. Friends and readers, I would recommend it.**