

It can be rewarding to use a company's anniversary to call attention to how its progress ties in with that of the country in which it operates. This was done on the 75th birthday of Johnson & Fletcher Ltd. (J&F), Salisbury, Rhodesia, a publicly owned company which has been operating in that area since about five years after the first European arrived there.

J&F, which imports timber, sells building supplies, and provides thermal engineering services, has some \$3.2 million in assets, annual profits of \$367,241, ten branches, twelve managerial employees, and 300 stockholders. It was established in Bulawayo, Rhodesia, in 1897 by two engineers, one electrical, the other, mechanical. Their sons are now top executives, G. R. A. Johnson being chairman (U.S. equivalent of president), and John Clarkson Fletcher, executive director (similar to executive vice president). Both officers understand the importance of communications and public relations and, since 1962, J&F has retained PR Counsel George Hindley Ltd., Salisbury.

Planning for the 75th anniversary started in 1969 at a meeting of top J&F executives and Hindley. Objectives were defined as showing J&F's role in the development of Rhodesia and emphasizing that J&F is an organization with "tradition and solidarity" and, at the same time, is "streamlined for modern competitive conditions." It was decided to develop five principal aspects which would lend themselves to good PR and publicity: an illustrated history of J&F; 75th anniversary symbol; a completely redesigned calendar; special gifts for employees; and inauguration of an annual award for the outstanding businessman in Rhodesia.

Hindley, who had had previous experience in writing commercial histories, dug into company and community files and prepared a 98-page, hard-cover book, titled "Families in Partnership: A History of the First 75 Years of Johnson & Fletcher Ltd." In 30,000 words, it traces the fortunes of the company from its beginnings (J&F started with capital of \$1,000 and at first provided machinery for gold mining, then the great economic hope of the country). The volume details failures as well as successes and notes how they related to the development of Rhodesia. There are 29 pages of photographs, many of which have never before been published. Included also are human interest stories (e.g., how steel plates used for storage tanks are believed to have been involved in the South African War by being used as protective armor while en route to customers). The book ends on an upward note: "After 75 years, the families of J&F are still in partnership. And so it may remain when the fourth generation makes its appearance, perhaps in time for the 100th anniversary in 1997."

To promote rarity value for the book, only 1,000 copies were printed. These were distributed to stockholders, management personnel; important customers; community, business, and political leaders; and the Rhodesian archives and libraries in branch office towns.

The 75th anniversary symbol, designed by a Salisbury artist, was widely used, in the form of stickers, on invitations, advertisements, windows, letter-heads, invoices, vehicles, and company-manufactured products.

The J&F calendar, traditionally featuring a single photograph, was redesigned for 1972 in poster style with full color photos of historical milestones and current activities.

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The report for the year ending June 30, 1972, also featured the anniversary. Printed in red and gold, it included a reproduction of the first set of accounts for the partnership -- a handwritten ledger statement -- and photos of the founders.

At each branch, there was a standard ceremony -- cutting of a cake decorated with the anniversary symbol and presentation of gifts. (For salaried personnel, there were trays made of Rhodesian copper and inlaid with the anniversary symbol; others were given highly prized frying pans, specially enameled with the symbol.) The ceremonies, held at "morning tea time," were featured, as were other anniversary activities, in the company publication. (The anniversary cake was usually cut by the youngest member of the staff.)

During the anniversary year, J&F directors met in all branch towns for parties. These were limited to staff members and their spouses. This practice was in keeping with Fletcher's feeling that, "although we wanted the country to know how we had grown with it and shared its economic ups and downs, we also thought the anniversary was a family affair". . . There was a no-news, no-speech thank-you party for the media at the executive's home. (They reported on the event's unusual non-publicity aspect.)

The anniversary activities climaxed with the presentation of the first J&F award to the Businessman of the Year at a banquet sponsored by Associated Chambers of Commerce of Rhodesia (ACCOR). The recipient, a past president of ACCOR and a member of U. of Rhodesia's Council, was given a \$1,000 trophy. His address stressed that the role of business goes far beyond making a profit and that "it must spearhead the development of a country."

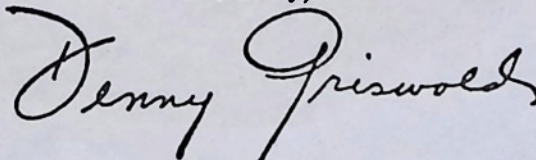
Expenses of the anniversary project (above the regular advertising and PR budgets) were about \$14,000, including \$5,600 for the history.

Dailies in Rhodesia's two major cities -- Salisbury and Bulawayo -- gave the anniversary double-page features. . . Congratulations came to J&F from all over the country. . . The company history was described by a distinguished group as "a contribution to Rhodesian historical literature". . . Hindley, in his anniversary report to management, was able to say that "the program put J&F even more firmly on the map and enhanced its reputation as a company which is a good and respected citizen and a humane employer. . . There was also a welcome, tangible by-product: J&F's sales following the anniversary year increased 6% over the previous twelve months.

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Sincerely,



Editor