

Fringe marketing

By [Nick Warren](#), issued by [Mann Made](#)

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When you hire people to conceive and produce multimedia communications for your brand, it's important to make sure that they're staying up to date with the latest and greatest creative practitioners in the industry.

Unfortunately we don't have many opportunities to do this in South Africa, but we do have at least three - the Loeries, the Design Indaba, and the Grahamstown Festival.

The Grahamstown Festival might not seem like the most obvious choice for a marketer to look for a commercial creative at first glance, but as the nation's premier arts festival it attracts the best and brightest writers, directors, actors, musicians, comedians, performers and producers in the land.

Best of all - all of these people are staging their own work, they are putting their own creative reputations on the line, and they are investing their own time and their own money into their own productions.

They are also subjecting themselves and their work to the judgment - not of a client with a fixed budget and a captive audience - but to the harshest of all critics, the fee-paying public.

This is exactly how and why this is where you will find the people that are best able to produce creative work of the highest quality and the utmost integrity for clients in the corporate world. They know what it means to be mediocre, to be good, and to be great in the real world. They know the difference because they have experienced it first hand. They have suffered or rejoiced by degrees. And they have learned how to take these lessons into the corporate space.

Looking at some of the shows here this year with my colleague, Mic Mann, we were both struck by the widely varied quality of the work. No surprises there. But what did surprise us was that some of the independently produced shows on the Fringe were far more engaging and compelling than some of the shows that were sponsored to appear on the Main Festival.

To a marketer looking to use the power of live interaction to convey a brand message this is interesting for a number of reasons.

There is the fact that any production of any story in any media is only as good as the team behind it. When that team is a self-motivated independent theatre company then they have a lot to lose if their product doesn't garner a positive response from a wide audience.

This in contrast to those companies that boast big-name personalities who are comfortably ensconced in full-time positions in large traditional theatres. A team in these contracted creative comfort zones can become complacent (and even contemptuous) when competing for an audience because they have the momentum of respect and reputation behind them.

There is a parallel here with the commercial communications industry - when you replace the word 'theatre' with the word 'agency' - this is where it hits home for the marketer.

Unless your agency is continually pitching their best strategies, their brightest stars, and their freshest ideas at every audience you give them, then you may need to step outside the mainstream and take a stroll around the fringes for your next smash hit engagement.

This is why I took my own play to the Festival, and that is why Mann Made Media sent me - to add my voice and lend my ear to that extended inspirational conversation between the best, the brightest and the most committed creatives - because

it's my job to do my personal best, and my it's my pleasure to learn from the professional rest.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Warren is Creative Director at Mann Made Media. His play, 'Sunday Morning' was a sell-out hit show on the Main Festival and is currently running at Kalk Bay Theatre in Cape Town before transferring to The Theatre on the Square in Sandton in September.

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