

Loeries 2014: Facebook's Rob Newlan *shares* vision of an open, connected world

 By [Jessica Taylor](#)

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Rob Newlan, Head of Europe, Middle East and Africa: Facebook Creative Shop presented a thought-provoking talk at the DSTv Seminar of Creativity 2014 on an open and connected world and what this would mean for the creative industry.



"What I love about an open, connected world, are all the possibilities that it puts forward.

"This is a great time for us to be living because we're just testing the possibilities."

It's early days - Facebook is 10 years old and Google's only been around since 1998 - and we're learning so much so quickly. So he says, "Don't follow what has been, I would say to you look forward. Look where this crazy sheep's looking."

Newlan's work involves building creative ideas through a combination of art and science. He said we've come through this shift of having amazing ideas to actually making them happen, and a great example of this is South African-born Elon Musk who "hasn't just thought about it - he's done it". Newlan notes that bravery and passion to actually do stuff makes a massive difference now.

People over pixels

Key to Newlan's talk is that we ought to start with people. Put simply, "Marketing *for* people, not at them."

Newlan made reference to the Ted talk: [The danger of a single story](#):

“ Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice - and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding. ”

He reiterates that there's a "danger that comes from people just navigating through one point of reference". And this is what's happening in the industry at the moment.

"We, by necessity, are creating universal pieces of content against the universal target." People are not against ads, they're against irrelevant ads. So the key is to target people based on who they are, because people connect with things that matter to them. "What's amazing is making amazing human experiences," he adds.

Big data = creative muse

It's one thing to say that you'd like to get, say, 1,000 likes, "but if it's the first thing you're looking at, it's probably not going to be delivering amazing business results for you."

We ought to start looking at the metrics as a means to generate consumer insights and relevant content. Not just for the target market, but the individual. "We get better at creating our TV ads because we have an understanding of who these people are."

One hundred-million people across Africa are on Facebook - that's half of the internet population in Africa! So when asked, "What's the best ad on Facebook?" He can only respond by asking "Whose Facebook?" That's because everybody's Facebook is different. Furthermore, everybody's context is different.

He did go on to showcase some of his team's best work, though. A couple that stood out were "the mega huge football game ad Newcastle could've made" and the McDonald's Fry Fotbol ad for the recent FIFA World Cup - both genius and absolutely relevant to illustrating his message.

“ At Newcastle, we don't believe in making multi-million dollar Mega Football Game Ads. We do believe in creating multi-hundred dollar storyboards about them. ”

Newlan ended the session with an open-ended question: "What are the things that will push you beyond your realm of comfort, and what would you do if you weren't afraid?"

Bizcommunity's BizTakeouts TV crew caught up with Newlan to chat about the first African Facebook Hackathon, the importance of mobile for Facebook and staying ahead of competitors.

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