

Ivan Johnson on judge and being judged

NEW YORK, US / CAPE TOWN, SA: 140 BBDO (formerly Net#work BBDO Cape Town) ECD Ivan Johnson was recently in New York judging the Art Directors Club 90th annual awards advertising entries. As the only judge from South Africa on the multi-national jury panel, he answers a few questions on what really lurks behind the golden statue or the gilt-edged frame.



Executive creative director of 140 BBDO (formerly Net#work BBDO Cape Town) Ivan Johnson: Avoid partisan bias like the plague.

So did you leave a good impression or a stiff bribe?

I just did what any qualified juror's expected to do... [laughs] ... our humble rand doesn't really stretch far enough to allow for anything more persuasive.

What exactly are they looking for from the judging panel? Any pointers for some aspiring virgin jurors out there hoping to make their indelible mark?

Yes, don't be partisan or biased towards your home country. It's one of the first things everyone will notice. Jurors from Latin America are notorious for favouring work from their region. You're there to find the *world's* best work. It's not a World Cup or Olympics. Countries don't win, the best individual work does. Secondly, be vocal. Unlike the Loerie Awards, which is still done by secret ballot, all the other big award shows have open debate. If you have an opinion, share it. If you disagree, let them know why. You get a chance to debate an ad's relevance to its market, the medium and the product. Final voting is done by a show of hands and if you are busy clutching yours - you need to be able to defend your minority decision. However, from my experience, if you're the only one who thinks it's a great idea, it probably isn't. This won't happen too often if the parameters are set before judging and always question if you're unclear.

You have judged Cannes Lions, D&AD in London, CLIOS in Santa Fe and our local Loerie Awards. What's still on your judging aspiration list?

I don't have a tick list but I haven't been invited to judge One Show in NYC and... er ... I'm still holding out for Ad of the Month!

OK, so if local isn't always lekker what is the criteria for selection? Obviously you have to have some sort of creative reputation to get noticed, but what is the clincher?

They all differ. CLIOS was my first international biggie, but I got a little referral assistance from Mike Schalit. So who you know could be a leg-up. D&AD was pretty straightforward - you win a Pencil and the following year you get to judge who

else should win a Pencil. Cannes is a lot more complicated. You first have to be ranked by your peers. Then if you're ranked high enough, the Creative Circle will nominate you as a potential juror. From that list the Cannes organisers will select the SA jurors. My selection as an Art Directors Club juror must have been a referral as they have no ties with our Creative Circle.

So judging itself is judged. Are you saying that jurors themselves are rated at judging?

Absolutely. I can't mention which award show it is, but I do know for a fact that every juror has a written report tabled by the jury manager about their performance. I suspect that this report is referred to when selecting future juries. But even with or without such formal reporting - you have to go there and do your duty as a juror, and that is find the world's best work. The award shows spend thousands of dollars flying you there, putting you up in a 5-star hotel and feeding you. The very least they expect in return is an enthusiastic, qualified judgement.

If there is no transparent feedback how would you know if you did indeed add value?

You certainly get a vibe. In addition, if you get an invite back to honour the winners, that's a clear indication you impressed. After judging CLIOS I was invited to present at the awards show in Vegas. (Probably their gratitude to me for introducing the virtues of Jagermeister to them). At D&AD I was asked to stay on to help the jury foreman decide on the ultimate prize - The Black Pencil. After judging Cannes Lions I was selected by the same jury president to judge at the Art Directors Club New York.

Maybe doing a good job at ADC NY will finally get you selected as an Ad of the Month judge here. Meantime, which was the best judging experience?

Cannes was the most glam of them all but it is the debating and sharing of ideas that excites me the most. It is also one of the few award shows where the judging and awards ceremony happens at the same time. The entire Riviera town is swamped by creative party animals from all over the world.

Now for the old chestnut. Do awards really have a part to play in the advertising business?

Communicating effectively today is all about creativity. Good agencies have highly qualified professionals who are tasked by clients to engage with their consumers. The ultimate aim is doing work that solves the client's problem, instils pride in the agency, changes the behaviour of the consumer and the ultimate 'sweet spot' is to be recognised for that achievement by your peers.

The Art Directors Club New York 90th Annual Awards presentation will be held 10 May 2011.

Ivan Johnson, creative director

Long stints at Y&R, DDB, FCB and finally BBDO have harvested several One Shows, Clios, Cannes Lions and scores of Loerie awards for art director Ivan Johnson. He has a penchant for radio as a platform for creative ideas. To his mind, it is still an undervalued, yet opportunity-filled medium. Ivan believes that inspiration comes from an insight. So much so, that when he worked on a brand that sells drums, not only did he make an award winning radio commercial (D&AD Yellow Pencil / Cannes Gold), he also took to playing them. He now plays in a band.

He was an executive member of the Creative Circle (a forum representing South African creativity), has done jury duty on the London Festivals, D&AD, Clios and Cannes Lions. He has served on the main advertising panel of the Loeries for the past 11 years. He considers being selected as an ADC juror an honour.

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