

Another dawning of an age of innovation



By [Richard Clarke](#)

26 Sep 2002

The Age of Innovation Awards on Tuesday 17 September 2002 at the Hilton had it all. Great jazz from Dolly Rathebe, a fascinating photographic exhibition by Jurgen Schadeburg and very good red wine.

All interwoven with conversation and confrontation between IT geeks, journos, entrepreneurs, visionaries, business decision makers and other innovative animals.

Dress code is mainly functional and practical as those that design and implement innovative business solutions don't seem to have time left over to vie for best, least or most stylishly dressed arbitrary competitions.

This is the Age of Innovation Awards for 2002 convened by Connexity publishing who are also the main sponsor. Both Michael Herman, Editorial Director and Sheenagh Levy, Managing Director, took turns to speak and provided background information and insight into the frame work within which these awards work.

The ad for submissions talked of "A new dynamic world. A new way of doing business. Rapid change, excitement, uncertainty, opportunity. Welcome to the age of innovation. New business models and daring ventures."

"We seek Innovative, entrepreneurial and creative spirited organisations."

Talk about laying down the gauntlet! The Age of Innovation Awards have been going for two years now and the 2001 list of winners included such luminaries as Airborn, DiscoverWorld, Fundamo, IQ Business Group, iTouch SA, Sasol Ltd with Rubico taking the Grand Prix award.

Both Rubico and Airborn featured again this year amongst the finalists illustrating a function of continuity and an ongoing focus on innovation.

This year the winners included Clickatell, a dynamic player in the bid for convergence between the internet and the mobile world, Digital Mall, a company that is helping to define the multi channel space for the retail industry and Espial Consulting, a company that questioned the conventional marketing model and now boasts a unique hybrid business model.

The next finalist I-Imagine earned special mention for earning international recognition and launching a new industry for South Africa. The fifth winner, learnthings is focusing on making education entertaining, informative and accessible and they are thriving in the market of digital education.

The last finalist Psitek is bridging the gap between small entrepreneurs and medium sized business by pushing the limits of technology for both emerging and established telecomms markets.

In celebrating innovation Michael Herman told the audience, "The aim of the campaign is to celebrate the entrepreneurial and creative spirit of organisations operating in South Africa by identifying those that have applied what we refer to as "beyond-the-box" thinking as a means of adding value. "

"We deliberately use the term "beyond-the-box" thinking as opposed to "out-of-the-box" thinking because innovation often requires of organisations not merely to improve established products, processes, technologies or organisational forms but to originate entirely new ones."

He went on to say that the world of the innovator is often a lonely one fraught with set-backs and huge obstacles and yet perhaps some of the greatest qualities of an innovator are perseverance and a passionate belief in what he is doing. According to Wolfgang Grulke "innovators are unreasonable, restless people for whom the best is never good enough, for whom there is always a better way."

"To them there are no imperatives, no rigidly defined boundaries.there are always other ways of seeing the problem. These are people who thrive despite the environment. They capitalise on everything around them, good or bad. They have access to the same resources as others, yet they always seem to be able to create more value"."

The winner of the 2002 Age of Innovation Grand Prix Award went to C.I.D.A City Campus. Leigh Meinert of Special Projects represented C.I.D.A on behalf of Taddy Blecher, the co-founder and CEO of this inspirational organisation. C.I.D.A are developing the first virtually free higher education institution in South Africa.

The reader will be questioning the choice of headline as this is not exactly the first time innovation is occurring in the world as we know it. However, innovation needs to be constantly nurtured, encouraged and helped along the road of trial and error.

This new dawning aided by these awards will drive home the innovative message to more people thereby instilling the ethic and building continuity and an ongoing process.

ABOUT RICHARD CLARKE

Richard Clarke founded Just Ideas, an ideas factory and implementation unit. He specialises in spotting opportunities, building ideas and watching them fly. Richard is also a freelance writer.

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