

Y&R: I have an agency...

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Y&R is committed to having 20 agencies by 2015 on the African continent. Leading the charge to achieve this is Yossi Schwartz, chairman of Y&R South Africa, now also chairman of Y&R Africa. To find out what that means, I caught up with him before he raced off to Lagos, Nigeria, on his mission.

Africa: Top of mind

Y&R has always had agencies in Africa. In fact, we have 10. We've operated in Kenya and Botswana for more than 40 years and it was our Colgate client who took us into Africa. But, while we had agencies on the continent, the network never truly offered enough support to them. With negative growth in Europe and a struggling USA economy, Africa has now become more interesting and appealing from an investment point of view. Suddenly clients are putting together product plans for Africa and where our clients are, we must be. It is clients' expansion into Africa that drives agencies' expansion on the continent.

Creating a network

Expanding onto the continent requires serious commitment and investment including knowledge transfer, plus continuous training, computer systems and IT support, and business processes etc. Remember Africa only got access to broadband in last two to three years. So, although Y&R had a network on the continent, it was, for the most part ignored. That is changing now. We are building a network that shares guidelines, structure, format, philosophy, soul, management depth and commitment to development and growth and the transfer of knowledge, systems and tools... When we are done with it, there should be no difference between the network in Africa and the one in Europe and the USA.

From dots to hubs

It is not viable to just put dots on the map as many agencies did 10 years ago... We're working to build a network of 20 agencies by 2015 that offer classical advertising and media driven business, plus digital. The digital offering will be driven by NATIVE VML, which will be the backbone for the continent. In October, we will launch in Kenya, which will become the hub for East Africa.

The northern countries of Africa, which are predominantly Muslim, are managed through Dubai.

There will also be a West African hub and Southern African hub. West Africa presents the biggest challenge as everything is different in Nigeria. Although the people are incredibly pleasant, it's not easy doing business there. We have an agency

in Lagos with 35 people, but it is not good enough. Think about it, in Nigeria you're servicing a market of 160 million people. We want to put some oomph into the agency, and grow it to no less than 100 people, partly by organic growth, but also through a digital acquisition.

The Southern Africa hub will be managed by Y&R South Africa, specifically the Cape Town agency. We are seeing some fantastic work coming out of this region, especially from Namibia. Acquisitions are also on our radar and we will look to target and establish new agencies in French and Portuguese speaking countries, with a specific drive to set up office in Mozambique and Angola. We have enlisted assistance from our Lisbon agency to overcome language barriers in these two countries.

Creating a cohesive offering

In a year or two we would like to have a cohesive offering throughout Africa.

We currently have a collection of agencies that have nothing in common, but the name on the door. Their approach, language and cultures are all very different, for instance, our Ghana agency is a very traditional one, while Y&R in Namibia is very sophisticated. We don't want to change this, in fact, we embrace individuality, but we will organically connect and unify them through structures, processes and culture to instil the essence of Y&R's global boutique. So, no matter where you are, no matter where you do business around the world, the Y&R name stands for the same level of commitment, excellence, entrepreneurial spirit - and, most important, results.

Time to join the dots

Y&R Africa will be gathering for its first creative planning session in October 2013 in Windhoek, Namibia. The representatives will workshop for two days with Graham Lang, Y&R SA Chief Creative Officer and Tony Granger, Y&R Global Chief Creative Officer.

If I can just achieve a handful of these strategic goals in next few years, I will be pleased. I am not promising to change the world, but I hope to help empower each agency to be the best in their market. It's time to join the dots. Y&R is committed and we are going to make the African network, work. Africa wasn't ready 10 years ago - and we weren't ready for Africa - but it is ready now. Ten years from now, it will be too late.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

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