

# The gold standard in creative excellence

By Leigh Andrews 13 Jun 2017

Cannes Lions kicks off this coming weekend, and we have ten SA jurors across the various categories. I spoke Jason Xenopoulos, CEO and CCO at Native VML about his role as jury member for the Cannes Entertainment Lions, how he's set to take Africa's creative revolution to the Cannes stage, and more.



Xenopoulos with Native's first gold lions from Cannes Lions in 2016.

The Cannes Entertainment Lions forum, taking place on 21 and 22 June 2017, will explore the future of entertainment and the role of brands, with global music, film, TV, gaming and sports talent in the line-up including the likes of Ellie Goulding, Russell Simmons, AB InBev, Nick Jonas, Ryan Tedder, Gabourey Sidibe, Alicia Silverstone and Mena Suvari, with the last two set to talk about the power of scripted entertainment alongside Paramount.

## Native VML set for the Cannes Entertainment Lions' Inspiration stage!

Exciting news for SA attendees is that Native VML, in collaboration with Absolut Vodka and Khuli Chana, will also take to the main stage! Xenopoulos will be joined by Native VML ECD Ryan McManus as well as Melanie Campbell, head of marketing White Spirits and Rum at Pernod Ricard South Africa and Khuli Chana, to showcase the One Source campaign and talk about Africa's creative renaissance, the continent's rapidly emerging consumer market, and the opportunity for global brands to capitalise on this vibrant creative revolution.



### PRODUCTION

Africa is on fire in Khuli Chana's star-studded new music video

Egg Films 7 Oct 2016

Xenopoulos explains, "Entertainment Lions is a new show under the Cannes Lions umbrella. It focuses on the intersection between brands and popular culture. In a world awash with media, brands must strive to become part of mainstream popular culture. This has led to a blurring of the lines between advertising and entertainment. The Lions Entertainment show celebrates the pioneers of this emerging art form."



### CANNES LIONS

Cannes Lions 2017 jurors announced, include 10 South Africans

5 May 2017

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With international award season in full swing, I asked this year's SA jurors what makes Cannes Lions stand out to them over the numerous other award shows, why being appointed as a Cannes judge is a career bucket list item, a few of their favourite memories of past Cannes Lions events, and the sizzle factor that makes work in their specialised category stand out.

Xenopoulos responds below...

■ ***Explain why being appointed as a Cannes judge is a career bucket list item.***

I have spent the past 15 years attending the Cannes Lions festival, staring enviously at the incredible work on display, being inspired by it, being driven by it, each year re-affirming my determination to reach that level.



CANNES LIONS

Xenopoulos spots contradictions at Cannes

Pasqua Heard 8 Aug 2016



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In 2016, after years of pushing the creative envelope, we finally won our first Lions: Gold, silver, and bronze. That was a career highlight for me... and judging Cannes Lions is certainly another. To be one of the few people privileged enough judge work of this calibre is a massive honour and an invaluable learning experience.

■ ***What makes Cannes Lions stand out to you over the numerous other award shows?***

Cannes Lions is undoubtedly the biggest and most important stage of all. It represents the very best in creativity from around the world. It is the gold standard in creative excellence. For me, and most other people in the industry, Cannes Lions is in a different league to all the other shows.

■ ***What's the sizzle factor that'll make something stand out to you in judging that work?***

For me, the best branded content is content where the brand has been seamlessly woven into the fabric of the content itself. This is not about old-fashioned product placement or overt branding. It is about understanding the essence of the brand and creating compelling, impactful entertainment that expresses that essence in a meaningful way.

■ ***Talk us through a few of your favourite memories of past Cannes Lions events.***

Every year, the Cannes Lions festival ends with a spectacular fireworks display. It is always an incredibly special moment for me. I stand on the beach, alone, watching the fireworks, and recommit myself to the goals and ambitions I have set for the future. It is a personal ritual I have stuck to for more than a decade. That aside, without a doubt the biggest Cannes highlight for me was going on stage to collect the gold lion last year.



ADVERTISING

And the knee bone's connected to the ankle bone

Danette Breitenbach 24 Jun 2016



■ ***Wow! Which areas do you predict SA agencies' work will excel in this year, and why?***

It's really difficult to say because I'm sure there is loads of work out there that I haven't seen yet. That said, in the past South Africa has excelled in the more traditional categories such as radio, print, and outdoor.



CANNES LIONS

#CannesLions2016: All the South African winners!

27 Jun 2016



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We have generally failed to win big in the newer and more integrated categories such as branded content, cyber,

integrated, and titanium. These are the categories where I hope to see South African agencies start to shine.

*We're all holding thumbs! The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity 2017 takes place from 17–24 June 2017 with Cinemark the local representatives of Cannes Lions for SA. The talk is set for 3pm on Wednesday, 21 June 2017 the Inspiration Stage. Click through to our [special section](#) for the latest updates.*

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of inclusion, belonging, and of course, gourmet and drinks! Now follow her travel adventures on YouTube @MidlifeMeander.  
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