

One to watch

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“The way traditional ad agencies are currently working is no longer a viable business model. Not for the agencies, and not for their clients,” says Jonathan Lang, Chief Creative Officer for [ONE Agency](#).



Quite a bold statement indeed, coming from one of the most highly regarded and responsible creative directors in South Africa.

“They’re being forced to produce more work more rapidly, with fewer resources. And they simply don’t have the budgets, the time, nor the skills to keep up with the quantity and quality of work required.

“From my experience, and from speaking to colleagues and clients alike, I know that local agencies are concerned by the compromised position they find themselves in,” Jonathan continues. “But since most of them are part of a cumbersome and costly global network, they have neither the freedom nor the resources to change with the times.

“The funds that should be going into servicing clients, upskilling staff and moving forward are paying their network dues into offshore accounts.”

A gloomy picture, indeed. Unless you’re prepared to be brutally honest about the industry as it stands; and get ruthlessly unsentimental about letting go of the stuff that’s holding you back.

And as a lifelong agency insider, he should know. After 13 years at Ogilvy, and three years at J Walter Thompson, where he was Creative Director and Executive Creative Director respectively, Jonathan started to see the writing on the wall.

But after his most recent international stint in an ultra tech-savvy environment where he worked closely with Facebook and Google – the new media giants of our time – he realised that the ad cheese has moved.

He concluded that the best kind of agency to work for would be a new kind of agency altogether. So, he conceptualised and planned this new kind of agency from the ground up as if it were a brief like any other. Only this time, it was his own.

His vision was to launch a creatively-driven agency and top flight production house braided into one – with all the skills on board to run truly integrated campaigns. The concept of ONE was born.

“One of the major reasons for the typical agency time lags and inflated costs is the traditional split between ideation and

creation. First comes all the thinking, and then the making. Which is the same as a chef creating new recipes on paper without stepping into the kitchen.”

But ONE is a lot more than the coupling of two business models; it’s mostly about the uncoupling of a lot of the outdated and inefficient processes, expenses, job titles and structures from the typical ad agency model.

The first thing Jonathan did was cherry-pick a team of multi-skilled creatives, strategists, directors, producers, animators, researchers, client service, and project managers that he has worked with and admired – some for almost twenty years.

For fresh inspiration and guidance, ONE looked towards Silicon Valley and other tech innovation hubs, and on-boarded some core principles like agility, direct client-creative contact, fewer and shorter meetings, goal setting, rapid prototyping, and iterative improvements.

And since they have all the skills and tools at their disposal, ONE can run multiple versions of assets on different platforms, to different markets – and then use deep data analysis to fine-tune campaigns while they’re running live.

Despite a lot of cynicism and confusion in the local ad industry, these truly are exciting times for brand communicators – so long as you have the tools, the freedom, the flexibility and the skills to make the most of the rapidly evolving media and marketing landscape.

And by the looks of things, ONE might just be the one to lead the way.

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