

TBWA sets out to be the biggest in three years

Tim Culley doesn't want much - just for TBWA Cape Town to be the Mother City's leading advertising agency within two years.

Whether it's top in revenue or creative awards doesn't matter. "If you achieve one, the other will probably follow," says the agency's managing director.

Unfortunately, there are a few obstacles in the way - successful, established agencies like King James, Ogilvy Cape Town and FoxP2. And then there are fellow up-and-comers like M&C Saatchi Abel, which has made a big impression in its first years.

Culley (33), however, has youthful enthusiasm on his side - which is one of the reasons he was hired last year by group managing director Ivan Moroke. "He said the agency was tired and needed rejuvenating," says Culley. "He needed someone radical and different."

UK-born Culley, who was once a housemate in the UK's Big Brother TV show and whose Twitter profile describes him as 'round bachelor boy, socialite and sports guru', spent the first few months learning about his inherited team. "I gave staff an opportunity to step up to the plate. Some are only months out of college but already doing good work. They have developed at a fantastic speed."

However, he says the agency had suffered from lack of creative leadership. He interviewed several potential executive creative directors, without finding one he felt would make the difference he sought. Finally, in August this year, he hired Damian Bonse, who had been with King James for seven years. Bonse says: "Until Tim called me, I wasn't considering moving. King James is a great environment."

Culley, whose own background is in client service, says finding the right creative leader was his priority for 2012 - year one of his tenure. "Next we want to start winning awards to put us on the creative map. After that, I want us to be number one in Cape Town by the end of year three."

One of Bonse's tasks is to quicken agency reaction times. Culley says it used to take weeks to come up with a creative idea for a client. "I'm a big believer in short, intense periods of creativity. We must offer quick turnaround and delivery of ideas."

The change seems to be bearing fruit. Account wins include the World Trade Centre, Rentokil and Shatterprufe. Then there's MTN Travel, a mobile application that allows users to book bus, aircraft and taxi tickets. "Potentially this is huge," says Bonse.

There's also work to be done in Africa for the Ceres fruit-juice company. So far TBWA has the account for six countries.

The agency's biggest client is the Western Cape government. It won the account two years ago then had to wait while an inquiry investigated whether provincial tender officials had followed correct procedures. The outcome was the all-clear to manage the account.

Culley says of his plan for Cape domination: "Going up against agencies that have been doing well for years, the targets we have set ourselves are ambitious. I still see the doubt in some people's eyes. But the advertising industry is cyclical. With the support of the TBWA group, there's a big opportunity for us."

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