

We Havas a French revolution

By [David Furlonger](#)

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French advertising group Havas is to open a media agency in SA. Havas already has advertising and digital operations here, as well as a sports and entertainment unit whose activities include live events, activation and sponsorship.



Since becoming global CEO and chair a year ago, Yannick Bolloré has stated he wants Havas to develop its media planning and buying business. The group now has two main divisions, Havas Media for media buying and Havas Worldwide for advertising.

Bolloré, who was in SA recently (during the week of 25-29 august), says one of the aims is to take on media responsibilities for existing advertising clients. "We believe they want a partner able to cover everything," he says. "We don't expect to convert everyone but we will talk to all of them."

At Havas Worldwide Johannesburg, under MD Ursula McAlpine, clients include SA Airways, car maker Citroën, oil company Total, household goods group Reckitt Benckiser and the Zurich insurance group.

No plans for local acquisitions

Bolloré says he has no plans to buy independent up-and-coming SA agencies - unlike some other global groups that have been on a local buying spree lately. Internationally, however, Havas has been on the acquisition trail, ending a long period of inactivity that led to critics labelling the group "ponderous" for failing to buy promising young agencies, which most big groups see as their lifeblood.

Bolloré admits it's fair comment. "We have been very timid for the last 10 years. Our strategy was not good. But now we have started to acquire again and we have the money to do more if necessary." The new activity is centred on Europe and the US.

Havas is effectively controlled by the Bolloré Group, a French industrial empire founded in 1822 and whose other interests include the Vivendi media conglomerate. Yannick Bolloré (34) was appointed Havas CEO by his father Vincent.

African footprint to grow

His recent SA trip was part of a broader African visit to look at the group's activities on the continent. Africa accounts for less than 3% of Havas group revenues but Bolloré thinks this will grow appreciably as African economies develop. "We can't be sure when that will take off - it could be five years, it could be 10 - but it will happen."

He adds: "Africa means a lot to us. We have invested here for 35 years." He says the group is seeing the benefits of a decision taken five years ago, to own its African agencies rather than run them as semi-autonomous affiliates. Since then it has opened in 13 new countries. Its Southern African operations are headed by CEO Lynn Madeley.

Source: *Financial Mail*, via I-Net Bridge

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