

PICAs aim to regain credibility



By Herman Manson: @marklives

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Where there are award shows, there is grumbling. About the judges, the rules, the loopholes. The "something-for-everyone" mentality draws in entry fees and fills up gala functions - just ask the local ad industry. The statues are there, if only all of them came out attached with a healthy dose of credibility.



Only ranking magazine award

The PICAs are the only ranking magazine award in South Africa but the narrow content categories, particularly in the business-to-business section of the awards, coupled with an ineffective system of judging, meant plenty of trophies doing the rounds with less and less prestige attached to them.

In 2002, there were 287 entries and 42 awards. Yeah, 15% of entries were guaranteed a winning spot. Last year saw 78 awards handed out, including those to runners-up and the highly commended.

This year saw the Magazine Publishers' Association of South Africa ([MPASA](#)) task [Jonathan Harris](#), as chairman of the 2010 PICA Committee, and his team with a much-needed rethink around how the awards are judged and presented. Harris has set out to align the PICAs with international standards by streamlining categories and revamping the judging process and panels. The end result, he hopes, will be a credible award show that provides direct feedback from judges to publishers, contributing to industry excellence in the long run.

Harris is a well-respected publishing executive, having successfully launched his own magazine, *Real*, which he later sold to Media24. Today he serves as the CEO of [Thought24](#), a Media24 division publishing some of South Africa's leading black female titles including *True Love*, *Real* and *Move!*.

Scrutinised the success

Harris and his team scrutinised the success of the [Tabbies](#), a B2B magazine award hosted by US industry body the Trade, Association and Business Publications International ([TABPI](#)), as well as to the National Magazine Awards hosted by the Magazine Publishers of America (MPA), for inspiration. A look at the methodology and categories underpinning these awards would create a common benchmark for judging publishing excellence at the PICAs.

Harris admits that in the past judging wasn't particularly scientific, lacked consistency and, in fact, at times was downright confusing as to how to judge categories on a like-to-like basis, with judges spending up to two days shifting through entries and picking the winner in the final couple of hours of the second day when all everybody really wants to do is to go home.

The judging process sees magazines deconstructed into parts to facilitate the judging process. The initial phase of the judging process has also been moved online.

Judges will rate their feedback against specific questions in an online panel which will add up the final scores automatically. Instead of the usual rush, judges will have 10 days to complete the process from the comfort of their offices. The systems backend will create a clear shortlist of potential winners while less successful entrants will fall away automatically.

Much more transparent

The feedback captured online will be collated and presented to entrants so they can see which product aspects judges think need attention. It makes the process much more transparent - editors and publishers will now know where and why their publications fell out of the running.

The final judging session will see the judges debating the shortlisted entries, which Harris hopes will create a higher level of debate. Time will be less of an issue - judges will have all day to compare and discuss only a handful of award hopefuls.

Awards categories have also been revisited and split into Individual, Title and Industry Awards.

Individual Awards incorporates the journalism awards inherited from the [Mondis](#) and include submissions for Writing, Design and Visual Production of the Year.

One award is allocated across the three sectors the PICAs cover, namely Business to Business, Custom and Consumer. Title Awards will reward the Cover of the Year, Overall Magazine Design, Online Solution of the Year and annuals, supplements and special issues, as well as the Launch or Re-Launch of the Year, with a winner announced in each of the three sectors.

Handed out per sector

Industry awards are also handed out per sector for Editor of the Year. The Custom sector will also see an award for the best tie-in with corporate marketing objectives and integrated marketing.

The narrow vertical channels have been done away with, so instead of *True Love* competing in a local category and *Elle* in an international category, they will now be measured directly against one another. If you win this year, says Harris, you really deserved to win.

One category that's still missing at the PICAs is for digital magazines. Harris admits this is a flaw but promises it will be rectified by next year. Focus rested on revamping the main body of the awards but digital magazines (as opposed to digital solutions for print magazines) will be integrated into the awards in the future.

In an effort to add further value to the event, MPASA has launched a [Media Summit](#) preceding the PICA awards function, aimed at providing attendees with real strategic insight on the future of the magazine publishing business. Both events takes place on 11 November 2010 in Cape Town, with the conference scheduled for the Cape Town International Convention Centre and the awards show at the Zip Zap Circus Venue.

Speed up the event

Harris promises to speed up the award event considerably, with it being all over by 10.30pm (when the after-party starts, hosted by DJ Fresh). No more long walks to the stage for the winners - instead, cameras will focus on the tables of the

shortlisted entries when the winners are announced.

The summit will see a keynote interview with publishing executive and media consultant James Gaines by Tim Modise. Gaines served as managing editor of *People*, *Time* and *Life* magazines before becoming editor-in-chief of multimedia publishing company Story River Media.

Panel discussions will be focussed around three themes, namely Advertising NEXT (advertising's evolution over the next decade), A 21st Century Strategy for Magazines (surviving the next 20 years) and Journalism 2.0 (changes in the way content is generated and presented).

All this is part of an exciting drive by MPASA and the PICA Committee to take back the initiative in an industry battered by the recent economic crisis and an identity crisis as it grapples with the rise of digital media. The PICA revamp will hopefully motivate the magazine industry to remember why most of us started in this business in the first place - a love for magazines and pride in producing an excellent read.

The closing date for 2010 PICA Awards entries is midnight, Friday, 27 August 2010. For any entry or MPASA membership queries, email Melony Boucher at MelonyB@printmedia.org.za or call her on tel +27 (0)11 551 9802.

For more:

- Bizcommunity: [MPASA press office for PICA Awards and Media Summit](#)
- Official MPASA site: www.mpasa.net
- PICA info on MPASA site: [2010 PICA Awards](#)

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