

Sydney Mbhele on the impact of creativity in business

 By Ann Nurock

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During Loeries Creative Week Durban, Ann Nurock spoke to Sydney Mbhele (@Nhlasyd), Divisional Executive: Group Marketing at Nedbank (@Nedbank) about how agencies need to really understand business, the importance of looking at an objective from a business perspective rather than a creative perspective, and the conservative nature of marketers.

Nedbank had 17 finalists at the Loerie Awards 2015 and walked away with one silver, two bronze and two certificate awards.

Nurock: What are you hoping to get out of the Loeries this year?

Mbhele: First and foremost, I want inspiration. Of course these events are a celebration of creativity in a way, but to be exposed to what other people are doing and how well they doing those things. The world we live in is very dynamic and very fast-paced, so much so that the things you would confirm to be right yesterday, will be irrelevant tomorrow, unless you're really clear about what's going on in the world around you. Brands have a challenge to stay abreast of all of these things, all of these moving parts, so I come for inspiration. The Seminar is getting bigger and better and it reminded me a bit of Cannes - great speakers, fantastic topics and a broad spectrum of conversations in this industry of marketing, so I love the inspiration.



Nurock: Nedbank has 17 finalists, which are a lot for one brand. How important are the Loeries Awards to Nedbank?

Mbhele: Gone are the days where awards were just about creativity for the sake of. Every time I look at creativity it has to be mirrored against business results, so I think we've moved away from that, so now anything that gets awarded, in my view, is based on the impact it's made in the market. So the more entries and finalists we have, the more we feel like we're making an impact, and we can also see those numbers internally, so it's very important for us to keep ourselves in check that the work we're doing is based on insights, is meaningful and that the output connectively working with our agencies is relevant to shift the dial.

Nurock: Would you agree that great creativity builds brands?

Mbhele: Totally agree! As I said earlier, creativity is not just about the bells and whistles, it's about standing cause and effect, because if you understand the cause that well, working with agencies you are able to find solutions that are creative and help you find the effect you want.

Nurock: What in your opinion are the greatest challenges facing agencies to produce great creativity?

Mbhele: I think it's probably two things. The first one is understanding clients' business, intimately so that you're not a supplier, you're not a third party and you're a true partner. I don't think agencies immerse themselves enough with the intricacies of the businesses they serve. So I'm in banking. What would be important for my agency, whichever discipline of marketing, it's about understanding how banks make money, the different aspects and complexities of banking, like the regulations, and all of those things, because it is in understanding those things that they can infuse in their own systems about creativity.

The second one is talent. I always find when I come to the Loeries, it's a great event and has great networking opportunities, but I don't know if there's enough development of talent. The guys who are dependent on brands like mine are

often highly experienced people who are not available, it is often very difficult to go to the next layer and get a sense of weight.

Nurock: What in your opinion are the greatest challenges facing marketers to produce great creativity?

Mbhele: I think we are very conservative in general as a country, we stifle creativity. We want agencies to push us to the boundaries, but when they do, we are the first ones to get very uncomfortable and revert back to the traditional. I've started to think when I get uncomfortable when an agency puts something in front of me, maybe that's actually the right thing to do. So the moment you start feeling that sense of discomfort, it's possibly the right solution. So the biggest challenge we have is just to open up and allow ourselves to be brave and bold, as long as the dots are connected, insights, the target audience, the macro environment we are working in, the trends we are seeing and the business imperatives. If you infuse all of those in a scientific way to allow solutions, allow them to go to market.

Nurock: You've worked in different parts of the world like London, do you think it's different there?

Mbhele: I think it's cultural. I've come across things that were very brave, I mean you look at Latin America at Cannes, you see how many awards they get and you wish it was you who did that. And then you go to the East and you see the most conservative of markets. When I was Global Marketing Director at Unilever, we used to have creatives developed for the rest of the world, alongside some links to China, for example, because of the conservative nature of that market. So I think it is cultural, and we do get those inferences ourselves in the market.

Nurock: How do you think creatives can sell better creative work?

Mbhele: I liked what one of the speakers, I think it was Ali Ali, said: "don't present options, just present one solution." So I think that's what you've got to do. In my own business, I'm a marketing person who works in a bank and obviously the bulk of the people in the bank are finance-orientated. For me to be able to get them to have the confidence in what we do and to continue to invest resources, from a marketing perspective, I've got to be able to talk their language, if I don't they're not going to understand how this thing contributes to the better of the organisation.

Likewise, agencies need to do the same if they are going to send work to clients, it's about being able to find an angle to articulate themselves and their strategies in a way that clients would easily consume them, so they don't get lost in their own creativity, but be able to connect from a business perspective, then you're speaking the same language.

Nurock: What is the greatest advice you can give to agencies going forward as a whole for the future?

Mbhele: I think articulate objectives from a business perspective instead of a creative perspective. I'm doing this because I want to influence people in this age group, in this race and gender in a specific way for the benefit of the business, instead of trying to take the high ground from a creative perspective. So I think agencies need to find a way to package whatever they put in front of clients in a way that demonstrates that they are not disconnected from the client.

I often make the distinction and don't call them agencies, I call them our partners and I never want the sense that one group of people sit on one side of the table, and the others sit on the other side of the table, it's about co-creation and building collectively together. We all celebrate solutions and the outcomes that come from that.

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ABOUT ANN NUROCK

Ann is a Partner at Relationship Audits and Management, a global consultancy that measures and optimizes client /agency relationships. Her proprietary Radar tool is used by 30 corporates globally and as a result she interacts with over 80 agencies of all disciplines. Ann spent 25 years plus in the advertising industry as CEO of Grey Advertising South Africa, and head of the Africa region followed by President and CEO of Grey Canada. Contact details: ann.nurock@relationshipaudits.com | Twitter [@Annnurock](https://twitter.com/Annnurock)

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