

## Joint statement on accusation of 2015 Loerie Awards judging irregularities

The Association for Communication and Advertising (ACA) and Creative Circle have issued a response to the accusation of irregular judging activity at the 2015 Loerie Awards and a breach of the Loeries rules pertaining to the eligibility of entries from pan-African and Middle East agencies...

The enquiry's mandate covered the actions of the Loeries CEO and the judges in carrying out their adjudication tasks as well as applying the Loerie rules, systems and procedures. The goal: to ascertain if any irregularities could be identified, in terms of the eligibility rules of entries and the actual judging process.



After hearing evidence from the Creative Circle, members of the local 2015 Jury and local Jury Chairs and the Loeries CEO, and after perusing the widely published Loeries entry rules and terms and conditions, the enquiry concluded that all entry and judging rules and procedures had been correctly followed, to ensure an equitable, fair and credible awards competition. In support of the enquiry's conclusions, the South African Jury Chairs were asked to submit affidavits confirming the integrity of the processes and the validity of the entry rules as they were applied in 2015.

The complaint regarding the supposed, inappropriate involvement of the Loeries CEO in the judging process was also addressed in the enquiry. Here again, it was established that the CEO had acted entirely above board in his briefing of the judges and in no way could it be said that he had influenced any judge or Jury Chairperson as to how to vote or score an entry.

The enquiry also found that the CEO had not exerted any influence over the decisions to award statues to entries. His role was confirmed in evidence by members of the Juries and the Jury Chairs as being strictly an administrative one, as defined in the adjudication rules.

The terms and conditions of entry into the awards programme, as well as the entry rules and judging processes, are properly documented and published on the Loerie Awards website. These terms and conditions, entry rules and judging processes were endorsed by the stakeholders of the Loerie Awards dating back to 2006 and remained materially unaltered for the 20 awards. The complainant in this case was, himself, a judge previously and happily worked within the guidelines of the Loerie Awards rules and procedures without complaint.

The entry rules, for example, have allowed for entries to be submitted by agencies from the rest of Africa and the Middle East since 2006 and for the complainant to now suggest that this is a new rule which prejudices South African agencies is not only false but disingenuous, since he was aware of the rule when he judged Loeries entries.



The awarding of statues to non-South African agencies is provided for so that deserved work can be awarded over and above those awards made to local agencies - not 'in place of'. Multiple awards (Bronze, Silver, Gold or a Grand Prix) can be awarded within a category, should the work entered and adjudicated be of the requisite standard. In terms of the Loeries Awards rules and adjudication process followed, the enquiry did not find that an awarded regional Grand Prix had precluded a South African agency from winning in the same category.

"There is a robust and fair system in place for judging work entered at the Loeries and there are stringent checks and balances in place to ensure that the judging results are beyond question," said Mike Gendel, Chairman of the Association of Communication and Advertising. "The same integrity and sensible procedure is in place for the selection of the 160 Jury Judges and the Jury Chairs. These are doyens of the advertising profession, both in South Africa and abroad, with universally recognised creative reputations. Ranking tables, peer recommendations and the quality of published advertising work is considered before a judge or chairperson is invited."

The investigation also confirmed that judges have no knowledge of which agency's work they are scoring and that judges who may have a conflict of interest are recused from adjudicating these entries. Justin Gomes, Chairman of the Creative Circle, commented "The enquiry looked at the treatment of the regional entries, and found that there was no irregular activity that would have prejudiced South African work."

The ACA, Creative Circle and the Loerie Awards Company have taken cognisance of the divided sentiment in the industry regarding the current rule that allows regional entries into the competition. In the spirit of transparency and inclusiveness, a meeting of the stakeholders has been convened for 2 September 2015, to hear the views and preferences of the Creative Circle, the ACA, IAB, BCSA, marketers and media agencies. The democratic decision of these stakeholders will determine whether or not to retain or amend this eligibility rule going forward.

Mike Gendel concluded: "Having established that there was a total absence of any substance to the complaints and the accusations levelled at the Loeries CEO and the Loeries brand, we turned our attention to the behaviour of the complainant and concluded that it was entirely inappropriate and damaging to the advertising profession."

"Not only were his remarks potentially defamatory to respected local and international individuals and professional associations, but he chose to engage in his vitriolic attack in the public domain instead of raising any concerns first with the relevant people in the Loerie Awards Company, the Creative Circle and the ACA."

"I have no doubt that we would have set his mind at ease, by referring him to the prevailing rules and procedures, and reminding him of his own past judging experience."

"The findings of our enquiry were clear and unambiguous: there were no irregularities in respect of either the entry rules or the adjudication and scoring processes at the 2015 Loeries. These findings were unanimous amongst the ACA, the Creative Circle, the local 2015 Loerie judges and the South African Jury Chairs. Based on the information collected during the enquiry, the Loerie Awards CEO was cleared of any wrongdoing in the judging process."

"In the interests of harmony in our profession I hope that the complainant will now be contrite and issue the appropriate apologies to those whom he has unjustly accused of wrongdoing. The ACA, Creative Circle and the Loerie Awards Company reserve their rights in the matter and will deal with the reputational damage to the profession directly with the agency concerned."

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