

What winning continent-wide awards means for the local ad industry

 By Leigh Andrews

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South Africa's King James Group was crowned Agency of Year at this weekend's African Cristal Awards. But what does that say about the state of the African ad industry?

Alistair King, Chief Creative Officer and founding creative partner of [King James Group](#), added some interest to my Twitter timeline this weekend when he tweeted pics of the judging and links to the [prize list](#) of the 2014 African Cristal Festival. Also, this tweet:

“ Huge night for [@KingJamesGroup](#) [#AfricanCristalFestival](#). We won lots and lots including Agency of the Year. Results <http://t.co/lZ9RP0M1n5>- alistair king (@ALsparkles) [October 4, 2014](#) ”

With my passion for local, African and advertising firing on all cylinders, of course I wanted to find out more, so I spoke to King to find out the nitty-gritty.

Back to basics: Early days yet for the African Cristal Award and African advertising in general

King says it is only the second year in which the African Cristal Award has operated, so it's still early days for the event. By his observation, only a handful of South African agencies entered, but certain countries like Egypt, Nigeria, Kenya, Morocco and Mauritius were very well represented.

"Egypt in particular has a very impressive ad industry and I absolutely loved the work they had entered. Their film in particular is significantly better than our own. It has a very comfortable style and looseness, and they have a great sense of humour. Our work felt uptight by comparison," King explains. But having said all that, he feels there's no doubt that South African advertising is considerably more sophisticated, and certainly better produced, than that of most African countries.

How SA advertising compares to that of the rest of the continent

Although he's not convinced South Africa's ideas are any better, King thinks we craft them well. But it's still not enough and we shouldn't be boastful, as King says more South African agencies need to enter continent-wide awards for us to really have a shot at claiming 'the best advertising country in Africa' title.

The South African factor: mobile

Not surprisingly, King says the African Cristal Award festival has a very large speaker component and that a number of speakers from central Africa spoke about mobile marketing. He feels mobile marketing is a big player in the region - one of his fellow judges works for an 80-person sized digital company in Nairobi, which he says, "is large by anyone's standards". The crux of it though is that he feels they regard the region as digitally undeveloped at this stage.

And little wonder, with Marketing Technology Educator [Dave Duarte](#) tweeting from the Social Media & Journalism Conference event held in Nairobi on 8 October that "SA & Kenya have internet freedom. Zim, Angola, Uganda, Nigeria, Malawi partial freedom. Sudan & Ethiopia not free."

Wondering about the judging criteria and prizes? All is revealed...



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King says judging is delicate as the panel didn't want to patronise themselves by dishing out awards to work that isn't of a global standard. At the same time, he points out, the role of the African Cristal Festival is to recognise work that could only have come out of Africa. The importance of this is that global award shows don't always recognise the work that is unique to a specific region, and that's why he feels this award really works, even though he points out that Africa is "madly diverse in itself... The cultural nuance had to be thought about with every piece entered." Ultimately though, the aim is to identify where the creative hotspots are in Africa, which is a question many global players ask.

The prizes awarded were categorised as Emerald (Bronze), Sapphire (Silver) Cristal (Gold), with Grand Cristal given in various deserving categories as well as numerous Special Awards selected by different panels.

Certainly lots to celebrate, but also lots of room for growth still, locally and continent-wise.

[Click here for more on the challenges of marketing goods and products on the continent](#) and [here](#) for all the African Cristal Festival winners.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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