

# Lacklustre 2012, golden 2013 and XL 2014 for NATIVE VML

 By Leigh Andrews

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Jason Xenopoulos, CEO of NATIVE VML explains the agency exploded onto the scene in 2013 as Agency of the Year at the Bookmarks, with the agency's name popping up again everywhere in 2014. Here's how...

It's been an excellent year for NATIVE VML, especially when you factor in its strategy to become South Africa's leading agency for the digital era by producing purpose-driven work that lives in people's lives.



Jason Xenopoulos, NATIVE VML CEO

But where did NATIVE come from? It didn't suddenly appear fully formed two years ago. NATIVE's Marketing Manager Aloysius Magerman explains that NATIVE was the original name of the company post-merger of Stonewall+, Cambrient and Brandsh four years ago. The [name was born](#) from the fact that most of the leadership were true digital natives and that we were native to digital. The addition of 'VML' came with [NATIVE's VML partnership](#), obviously.

With the basics down, I asked Jason Xenopoulos, CEO of NATIVE VML, to tell us more - he emphasises the importance of taking strategy and creativity beyond the strategy and creative departments, and that all-important inspiration and creative energy...



Images from the Nedbank Ke Yona campaign

## ■ What's the basic work flow or creative process in the agency?

**Xenopoulos:** At NATIVE VML we're obsessed with creating value: value for our clients, value for their customers, and value for the wider world as well. In order to create value, you have to understand each stakeholder's needs. We begin our creative process by clarifying our clients' business objectives while really "getting under the skin" of their customers' needs. We have several strategic-planning tools and methodologies that assist us in extracting these insights and forming them into a compelling creative brief. This creative brief forms the basis of the ideation process, which is an inter-disciplinary collaboration between specialists from various areas within the business. We do not believe that strategy and creativity are the preserve of the strategy and creative departments. Everyone at NATIVE VML is expected to be strategic and creative. At the end of the day, regardless of the process or work flow, great ideas are born from that intangible stuff called inspiration. We try our best to create an environment that feeds and stimulates everyone so that they can channel creative energy, which is vital to the creative process.



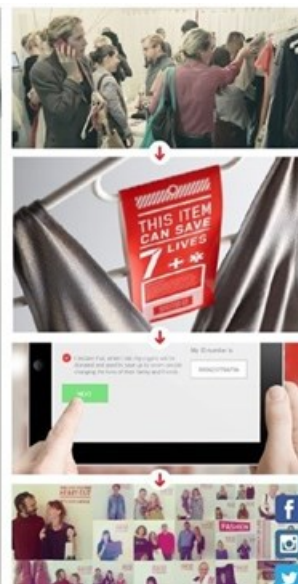
Campaign to 'make syphilis disappear'

## ■ List any exciting new developments in the team that have enhanced Native VML's overall skillset.

**Xenopoulos:** We believe that the future of marketing sits at the intersection between creativity and technology. As a result, we are adding skills on both ends of that spectrum. On the one hand, we are deepening our knowledge of various tech platforms to enhance our ability to deliver real business value to our clients, while simultaneously extending our full-service marketing resources to provide a more fully integrated marketing solution to brands.



Work for The Exchange



## ■ Wax lyrical on awards you've won

**Xenopoulos:** Over the past 12 months we have totally overhauled our creative credentials. After a lacklustre performance at award shows in 2012, we burst into the limelight last year with a host of awards, including being named Agency of the Year at the Bookmarks in October 2013, and the past year has been even better. We netted a host of awards at local and international awards shows, including The New York Festivals, One Show, Webby's, SXSW, Solal Marketing Awards, Discovery Sports Awards, Ad of the Month, Ad of the Year, Ad Review, and Pendorings, all of which were topped-off by a fantastic performance at The Loeries, where we won nine Loeries including two Golds, resulting in us placing fifth overall among all large agencies in South Africa.

**Magerman:** In particular, our work for [Ke Yona](#), bookly and The Exchange are probably our most awarded pieces of work, with [six wins at the recent Assegai Awards](#) and a true showcase of work that lives in people's lives.



The bookly campaign

### ■ **What are your thoughts on the state of the local advertising awards industry?**

**Xenopoulos:** The local awards shows are great. Unfortunately, the quality of the work is still lacking, particularly in the newer categories. South African creative work competes with the best in the world in more traditional categories like radio, print, and outdoor. But in digital, mobile, branded content, and especially in integrated, we are still far behind our international counterparts. These are the categories where NATIVE VML strives to make the biggest impact.

### ■ **Tell us about key account wins this year that have made an impact on your portfolio...**

**Xenopoulos:** 2014 has been a great year for us from a new business perspective. In addition to a host of smaller account and project wins, we have added a number of premium brands to our portfolio, including kulula.com, Ster Kinekor, Red Bull, and Old Mutual.



Image from the Chivas Brotherhood Suit campaign

### ■ **What's next for Native VML?**

**Xenopoulos:** We'll continue our quest to create value - for our clients, their customers, and the wider world - by producing purpose-driven work that lives in people's lives. We'll also continue to extend the depth and breadth of our services in order to secure our position as South Africa's leading agency for the digital era.

### ■ **What trends do you see as the biggest to come in 2015?**

**Xenopoulos:** I predict a greater focus on effectiveness, responsiveness, and integration.

Sounds like NATIVE VML's set to continue its winning streak next year. [Click here](#) for more on NATIVE VML, follow them on [Twitter](#), and view the bookly video embedded below.

## 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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