

Q&A with IAB Digital Summit speaker Matthew Bull

In an exclusive five-part series, Bizcommunity interviews five international speakers set to be featured at the IAB Digital Summit in Association with BBC.com. taking place on 19 February. This week, we chat to Matthew Bull from The Bull White House in New York, to find out why he thinks the most important thing in life is to have an imagination...

■ ***Can you give us an example of how the industry has changed between the time you first started working in advertising and now?***

Bull: You're so cruel...



Matthew Bull

Well, when I first started in advertising I wrote copy on a typewriter - albeit an electric one. Then, slowly but surely I graduated to a Commodore 64 and a floppy disc. So cool. I guess you can see that things have changed a lot - and really, to prosper and stay in love with this business, you have to become multi-lingual a media sense - in other words, you have to embrace the fact that more and more ways are being made available to you in order for you to speak to consumers.

I've been lucky in that I have always had an appetite to try new technologies - I had a Sinclair games computer (the first gaming machine) as soon as I could afford one... and have always tried to get the latest gear. I do it under the guise of needing to understand where technology and therefore society is going, but actually I just love being the first at getting things.

Funny anecdote: I remember when I had my first cellphone - a Motorola. I was driving home from work at O&M:RST&M in Cape Town when one of the hottest girls in the agency pulled up alongside me at the traffic lights. There I was talking away, thinking I was cool, until she looked at me and gestured that I was a wanker. Kind of killed the cool.

■ ***What has been the most invaluable piece of advice offered to you during your career in advertising?***

Bull: Two things really: The ex-CFO of Hunt Lascaris, Alan Teeger, told me to never run away, always run to.

And Sir Frank Lowe told me, during a particularly tough time whilst I was in London, that I was there to do "something fabulous" and never set my sights lower than that.

But I have been blessed to have had three significant mentors in this industry - John Hunt, Robyn Putter and Sir Frank Lowe. The sum is always far greater than the parts.

■ ***What are your expectations of the IAB Digital Summit & Bookmark Awards and the South African creative industry?***

Bull: If ever a country historically demonstrated that it was not limited by its reality, that's South Africa. I want the industry to its utmost to rise above the technological difficulties it experiences day to day and demonstrate its vision and talent. I hope that Bookmarks plays a role in enabling, inspiring that.

▣ ***How do you think US agencies are ahead of the other global agencies and what do you think South Africa could learn from that?***

Bull: In the US, we are at the very forefront of society's development due to the digital revolution - so we live the changes every day. That's a massive advantage. We are all behind the digital curve - the propeller heads are always one leap ahead - but in the US we are closest to them. On top of that, the agency world has developed to the degree that there is really no such thing as a digital agency - certainly not when it comes to conceptualising digital ideas. Creatives, planners, account people, producers all fluent in digital.

▣ ***What impacts are you seeing digital make on a traditional advertising model?***

Bull: In America, it is traditional advertising now - it's mainstream media. I think the mainstream industry caught up really quickly after a slow start - boiling frog syndrome - and now digital is part of everyday life. That means that young, digitally savvy people can swarm into our industry, no longer fearful that we will demand a radio spot and digital be damned. So once again, young propeller heads have a home to come to, which for a couple of years they didn't. This is obviously vital for our business. On top of all that, I think we are getting much better at using the technology to create more interesting, jaw-dropping ideas. I guess the same as when TV began, the more we understand the medium, the technology behind it and its effect on people, the more we can explore fresh, adventurous ideas. The exciting thing is, that it is only in its infancy. There's much more to come.

IAB Digital Summit and Bookmarks, ticket sales are open. Join the local digital industry as it celebrates creativity and innovation with a world-class line up of international and local talent. Seats are limited and due to over 800 entries received tickets are selling fast, go to <http://iabsa.net/summit/home/> to find out more, register to book and avoid disappointment.

To assist in getting you there without breaking the budget, special travel and accommodation packages with kulula.com can be found [here](#), or call 011 454 3534 with any queries.

ABOUT MATTHEW BULL

Bull founded one of South Africa's premium agencies Lowe Bull, was CEO of London agency Lowe and Global Chief Creative Officer of Lowe Worldwide, then started New York agency Bull-White House.
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