

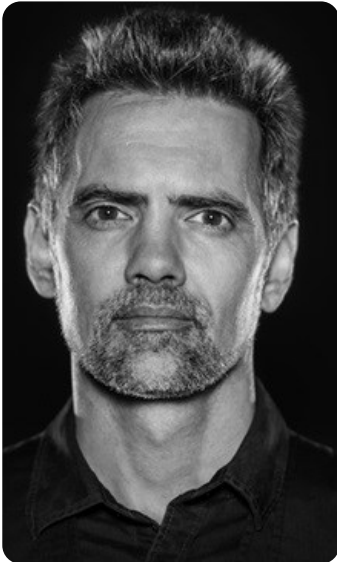
Pepe Marais of Joe Public on lighting up the "grey" Promo & Activation category

 By Ann Nurock 29 Jun 2015

Pepe Marais, Chief Creative Officer of Joe Public, was part of this year's Promo & Activation judging panel at Cannes Lions, where Joe Public was the only South African agency to strike it lucky by bringing home a Bronze Lion for its 'Vote SA' Cinemark experience app...

Our media correspondent on the ground in Cannes, Ann Nurock, interviewed Marais, where he spoke about the Promo & Activation category. He explains some of the confusion in this category, as well as the slickness of judging and why he feels South African entries just aren't at the highest level yet.

Nurock: What stood out for you most in judging the 2015 Cannes Lions Promo & Activation category?



Marais: It's actually a bit of a 'grey' category as 'Promo' is clearly defined as including price point, driving the consumer to act to the point of actually purchasing, but it's a different case for 'Activation', which has suddenly become so broad. If you are suddenly putting a billboard on the back of a truck and a customer acts on seeing that, that's an activation.

The other thing was to see through that slight level of confusion in the category, where everyone was looking for little gaps to enter their work through, but just to keep looking for strong ideas, as this is where the idea really shines. One example for me is The Giant Whopper Burger by Burger King - it's very analogue and simple, like using the piece of paper wrapped around a burger, and then using the digital to expand on the idea, to give it huge voice from a one-store level. That gives me a lot of hope and excitement for the next year, as it shows you can take a really simple, basic idea and make it big and powerful.

So the judging process was very insightful for me, given my background.

Nurock: How did you find the judging process itself?

Marais: I found it super amazing, very slick and organised. We judged out of our offices for the first month

like a semi-filter, taking the work down from 3,300 to 2,000 and then got back here, broke into groups and three days took it down from 2,000 to about 350, and then got together and started to discuss a final shortlist, which ended up at about 320, but meticulously going through, bringing back some work we thought should be part of it, so it was very robust but still, if you want to end up at the top of the pile, you need an exquisite level of work as the middle of the pile is all the same - very good, but 300 pieces of really good. cut through that you need a bit of a miracle.

Nurock: Did you agree with the winners, were they worthy?

Marais: Yes, with the majority. Interesting to see in the panel of 25, how because it's a case of discussing the work and not just voting, so when someone has a strong opinion I may not have seen that way, it could swap my opinion. As always, work that wins gold you'll see winning gold across the show, it just naturally goes to the top. It's kind of like the silvers and bronzes are debatable. Then for me personally, I really love the Volvo Grand Prix, but felt it was awarded based on what could still be done with it. It's a new idea, we could make it a product or do more with it in future, but that's not factual, it's based on assumption. Take something like the Whopper example - it's real, happened, real with all the results on the table. But we all agreed on it, everyone had their opinion and I agreed with that.

Nurock: How does SA compare to the rest of the world on Promo & Activation?

Marais: We have a long way to go. I'm going back home with amazing insights, not just for Promo & Activation but on all our thinking. I was saying earlier on that sitting in South Africa, I'm a relatively big fish in a small pond, but coming here to the global stage, I'm a 'nothing' again and what I say carries no weight. It's opened my mind again to how much there is for us to still learn and how much we can grow as professionals.

We've got a long way to go in terms of making our ideas much bigger, what I saw here is the ability, not just clever entry videos but some hard evidence, because there's a lot of debate about looking bad in awarding a small idea that's trying to be big. The stuff that got awarded are all really big things. Take the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge - that's massive, the Whopper Burger too, as well as #LikeAGirl - there are at least 10, 15 cases like that.

How do you take our local ideas to that level? They are of the right calibre, we just don't make them big enough.

Nurock: What has been your favourite piece of work, that you've seen here and has really touched you?

Marais: Surprisingly not the Whopper as I didn't spot it initially. I'd have to say the Ice Bucket Challenge really moved me. What moved me the most was being at the event and the big proportion of it is just so plastic, we're living in a fake world. To see that everyone has the ability to notice a piece of work that was done with pure intention, she just wanted to do something for the person she loved, but it had mammoth global appeal, and she raised a quarter of a billion US dollars.

Nurock: It is also the only award so far that got a standing ovation.

Marais: Yes, it shows the human ability to connect with deep emotion, no matter how fake we are, there's something real under each human being. That was an example to me of what we should try to do for our clients. Get them to connect - maybe not at that level, that was very special and actually brought tears to my

eyes at the ceremony and made me go 'Wow' - but it inspired me to ask whether we can do work for the intention of getting people to move towards brands.

Nurock: The big theme for me in Cannes this year is all about doing good. Everything needs to have a purpose. If I look at most of the Golds and Grands Prix, there's always a higher purpose - know purpose is really important for you. It's almost like these have become the 'Do Good' awards. The great thing is that you can still have amazing creativity, and do good.

Marais: Absolutely. That reminds me of another piece of work that I thought was amazing - the Interceptiv by Volvo, where they 'hijacked' the Superbowl. And take the Grand Prix in Promo & Activation, the Volvo Lifepaint, it was one of my top three, but is so aligned with the brand's purpose, for a brand that stands for safety as a purpose, that's the higher purpose of Volvo, no debate there. It connects to a higher level for safety of people and also cyclists. I would hope that it gets taken to another level, which is also what Cannes does. Often a client sees work that's done on a small scale, it does get this acknowledgement, and then they go and activate it bigger because they go 'Wow, that's an awesome idea'.

Nurock: Is there anything at Cannes overall that's been a disappointment?

Marais: Well, this is only my second time judging, and last time I was at such a weird place in my career, I didn't absorb as much. But I can't list any real disappointment. There's a really good intent behind the awards, and people are really looking out to award real work, there's debate around rewarding clients' work over non-profit, but also to be aware of all the great stuff done for not-for-profit.

I leave with nothing negative. Massive inspiration to do greater work for our clients and my own creative space almost re-enthused. If you think about it, this entire event is driven by ideas. Everything that exists here comes from one little idea that makes a difference to the client's business. It entuses me to take the fight forward, to fight for our rightful place as professionals, as an industry.

Nurock: Thank you, Pepe

[Click here](#) for a reminder of the 2015 Cannes Lions Promo & Activation wins, where Joe Public brought home Bronze for its 'Vote SA' Cinemark experience app.

ABOUT ANN NUROCK

Ann is a Partner at Relationship Audits and Management, a global consultancy that measures and optimises client /agency relationships. Her proprietary Radar tool is used by 30 corporations globally and as a result, she interacts with over 200 agencies of all disciplines. In addition to Radar, Ann attends the Cannes Lion Festival of Creativity on behalf of the SA Creative Circle and Bizcommunity and presents the trends to all sectors of business. Contact details: Ann.nurock@relationshipaudits.com; LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/annnurock>
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