

The state of advertising in SA - Ambition. Deliberate. "Let's go, let's do it"

South Africa is known to punch way above its weight internationally, but this year saw the country drop 20 places in the Cannes rankings since its first appearance at Cannes in 1957 from sixth to 26th this year.

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#) 11 Oct 2024



Source: © Gallo Images [Gallo Images](#) The Creative Circle hosted a panel discussion on the state of SA's advertising industry

In contrast, the Middle East only won their first Lion in the 2000s, ranked 17th. SA was ranked seventh and eighth. This year the Middle East won 19 awards and South Africa one. The Middle East is ranked eighth and SA 26th.

In a frank discussion on the state of advertising in the country, a panel hosted by the Creative Circle and chair of the Creative Circle Carl Willoughby the chief creative officer, TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris, discussed the results or lack of results at this year's Cannes Lions.

Willoughby pointed out that while Cannes and the marketing landscape have evolved, perhaps South Africa has not.

"We tend to over-index in the film, print, radio and craft categories. We do well in the traditional categories and more recently we have shown up in other spaces such as social, influence, PR and activation," he says

"We talk about locally relevant and globally competitive, but while we celebrate the local work, we are not pushing the calibre forward."

But he says, it is not about pointing fingers but about being more conscious, being more aware of it. "If it is on everyone's radar, we can say there's a bit of a red flag that's popping up at about the standard of our work."

Sibusiso Sitole, co-founder and executive creative director of The Odd Number reluctantly agrees with him "South African work is so nuanced and can be so beautiful, and our craft is amazing, but the quality of the

idea has dropped. Sometimes you see a piece of work but you don't really know what the idea was."

A talent crisis

For Bridget Harpur, head of marketing at Volkswagen South Africa one bad year does not make a crisis but where she sees the challenge is in talent acquisition and retention.

"Previously if you were creative the only place for you to be with the artist or advertising industry now, for creators, there are so many other platforms that possibly are the more attractive industry.

She adds that the industry is not that attractive anymore but there is talent in this country, and there's beautiful craft.

"We are famous for that so I think there is a lot of potential and we should not all fall down because of 202

The sheer scale of it

Since the early 2000s there has been a proliferation of different categories, and you get one piece of work that wins across multiple categories.

"But that kind of work is generally executed at kind of scale. Look at the kind of scale that's coming out of countries like the US or even places in Europe, these are big campaigns, and they are executed at scale," says Fran Luckin, chief creative officer, VML.

She adds that they are also executed with conviction, something she feels we are not doing. "These are the campaigns that win across multiple categories. Ricky Rick is one example because it was executed at scale but, we're not doing it at the level other countries are."

For her is it a lack of conviction. "We're not driving it. And we also get stuck in the awareness zone, so we don't come up with a solution.

"We do this beautiful campaign that drives awareness, and then there's no real-world solution or clever product innovation. We do not follow through."

Referring to South America, she also believes we are not working together enough.

"It is a collective responsibility. Collaboration on huge projects is cooperation with other agencies, with other disciplines, and other clients. I do not know if we are doing it."

Being deliberate

Pepe Marais, co-founder and integrated group chief creative officer at Joe Public has been witness to the shift in the South African industry, from the 90s to the 200s when agencies were bought out by groups.

"The business side of advertising was focused on relationships and on advocating great work, but there has been a shift that the business is not based on creativity.

"As an agency, we spend 95% of our time creating crap. That's why creatives are leaving our agencies."

He points out that it is 400% more effective to be creative. Will adds that the cost of dull was a topic that

surfaced at Cannes.

“The stat was quoted that brands that don't use work that is emotionally resonating or creative have to spend 7.3% more on media to have the same resonance.”

Vaughan Croeser, AB InBev recalls when he joined the marketing team at the company it was known that InBev was the worst client.

He explains that there was a deliberate plan to move from this to where the company is today – named twice as the number one brand at Cannes.

“If you think about the South Americans and their deliberate hustle it is the same. It is also ambition.”

“While you can have good and bad years, you must have ambition and you must demand the work. I say let's go. Let's do it.”

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