

Innovation and experiential advertising

So what makes a truly brilliant experiential campaign? Peter Bidenko, creative director of Tequila in Australia and Loeries Experiential Judging Panel chair, and Nici Stathacopoulos, managing partner of proximity#ttt and assisting Experiential chair, took some time of their frantic Loeries judging schedule last week to discuss this.



Peter Bidenko, creative director of Tequila in Australia

Both Stathacopoulos and Bidenko were vocal in their enthusiasm about the experiential category. Because brand communication through experience breaks the norms of what is usually considered to be advertising it is in this category that the most innovative work is happening globally.

“What’s great about the experiential category is that virtually any channel is open to create noise and engagement with the audience,” said Bidenko.

“It’s about the use of spaces and places we didn’t think of in the past to advertise or communicate in,” says Stathacopoulos.

The rewards of innovation

“Innovation” is the key factor that Loeries entries must have to win, and Bidenko explains why it’s such a relevant judging criterion. “It drives a stronger response,” he said. “Innovation is necessary because people are so jaded to the thousands of marketing messages out there. It allows people to engage with the message, and for us to find new ways to get them to interact with our brands.”

Bidenko noted a campaign that drew his attention at Cannes a couple of years ago. The campaign, which just happened to be South African (Network BBDO) was called [“Ghost Trolley”](#), and involved a small remote-controlled trolley that bumped into people, as if pushed by an invisible, ghostly shopper, offering other shoppers a taste of Ghost Pops.

Stathacopoulos talked about the very traditional advertising space of a billboard, but with a twist, that she saw in Australia. “Runners run past this billboard where they are instructed in big letters to send a text message to a number,” she explained. “A track for them to run to is then downloaded to them via Bluetooth. At the end of the track is the blurb for a brand of mineral water. It’s not just a billboard; it’s engaging me as a consumer.”

New ideas for new media

With Facebook, MySpace and YouTube making new media such as SMS and email seem outdated, marketers are having to make huge efforts to stay abreast of new technology to find ways of exploiting it.

“In Australia, media budgets for beer advertising are being taken, and used to create a huge experience,” says Bidenko. “Three million dollars might be spent on the production of a huge ad that's released on the web. It gets forwarded on and becomes viral before it ever hits a television.”

The key, according to Stathacopoulos, is not finding new ways to advertise to people, but finding ways to market to them so that they don't know that it's advertising. If they have a positive association with an event place that underpins the brand values of a product, and they are reminded of that product, it is far more effective than confronting them with a blatant ad.

“It's the concept of amplification,” says Bidenko. “If 100 people see something, and it gets filmed and then broadcast on a digital channel, then 100 000 people can see it. But it has to add to their life, even if it's just a chuckle.”

The beauty's in the brand

Although people are bombarded with marketing messages, branding is still incredibly important, and people are more aware of them than ever before. “There's a quote from David Ogilvy, ‘the customer is not a morose she's your wife’,” said Stathacopoulos. “Forty years later, that cannot be more apt. I took my 15-year old son shopping for a laptop, and he knew exactly what brand he was looking for. I pick my favourite brand that I know because everything else is just noise.”

And as Bidenko explains, the power of a brand is enough to draw a following, and the resulting experience further enhances the brand.

“When the Apple Store opened in Sydney, there were queues of thousands of people all the way around the block,” says Bidenko. “The store creates an experience for people that's consistent with what the brand represents. The shop follows the brand values and then adds to the values, and people queue up to take part.”

On the home front

Because of South Africa being slightly behind the curve on technology adoption, we tend to imitate, rather than innovate. Nonetheless, there are opportunities created by our unique market, and there are concepts that show truly original thought being showcased at the Loeries this year.

“Some of the pieces leave me saying ‘I'm sure I saw this last year’, but where people have put taken the time to think, we're seeing truly original work,” said Stathacopoulos. “Those that are motivating to clients will be worthwhile, and being brave, because the brand is worth it and the customer experience is worth it, are leading the pack.”

“You have to take risks,” says Bidenko. “Sometimes they succeed and sometimes they fail, but the best work has the ultimate relevance to the brand. There are a lot of different factors, time and place, the customer's point of view, and whether the work supports the brand values. With all of those, that's when the magic happens.”

- The Loeries' judging took place 30 June - 4 July 2008. The winners will be announced at the 30th Annual

Loerie Awards Festival Weekend, taking place from Friday 25 July to Monday 28 July 2008 in Margate on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast. To view the 2008 finalists, go to www.theloerieawards.co.za/awards/finalists/2008/.

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