

The value in Superbrands

The launch this week of the first Superbrands book in South Africa has drawn predictable criticism from a number of quarters, mostly media and marketing purists, about the credibility of this project, despite it flourishing in more than 40 countries.

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#) 17 Nov 2005

The main argument is that companies don't get Superbrand status unless they buy into the Superbrands book.

Now, while this argument might well be valid, from a marketing point of view one has to ask whether organisations such as Superbrands do offer some kind of value, in spite of imperfections.

And the truth of the matter is that, particularly in South Africa, there does seem to be some considerable value.

Quite simply, it strikes me that it doesn't matter who hands out awards and certificates to business in South Africa and no matter how dodgy the selection processes are, companies accept these awards with great delight. Not only do they accept any old award, but they flaunt them left right and centre. Take the PMR Golden Arrow Awards for example. Now these are probably the most criticised of all corporate awards, yet one will find their framed awards certificates gracing the reception areas of some of the biggest corporations in the country.

Big money

A lot of big companies pay big, big money for a PMR award.

Then of course one has the much vaunted Loerie Awards. Without doubt this has nothing to do with advertising efficiency, effectiveness or even success. Advertising is not judged by those to which it is aimed but simply by those who create it. And whether it is the local Loeries or the prestigious Cannes awards, there are literally hundreds of examples of advertising campaigns, such as Budweiser, most recently, that got to international honours despite being complete flops and actually losing sales and brand share. Yet advertising agencies live or die by the number of awards they get. Not only because they have what many might perceive as misguided egos but because awards impress their clients.

The point is that no matter what awards linked publication one looks at, the purists will have good reason to point fingers simply because somebody somewhere has to pay. And where there is money there is bias. The fact is that corporate award events of any kind as well as awards publications of any kind, are all businesses. They all work on the basis of there being no free lunches. And they will survive for precisely the same reason that there are still so many magazines flourishing today that unashamedly write wonderful editorials about the companies who advertise with them.

Of course, they're all flawed and some of them are indeed close to being out and out scams. But, the fact of the matter is that corporate South Africa laps them up. Rightly or wrongly, companies see them of a great way of enhancing corporate pride and giving staff boards of directors, shareholders a nice warm feeling. Not to mention that heady feeling of walking up to a podium in front of one's peers and being hugged, handed

framed certificate and photographed with some or other celebrity.

They all clearly have a lot of appeal because a lot of intelligent people in big businesses pay a lot of money for them.

Glory

So, if one believes that basking in some sort of glory, however nebulous, goes some sort of way to motivating employees, customers and shareholders, then maybe these things are worth the money.

Undoubtedly, it is offensive to the purists but the fact of life is that they are all legitimate businesses offering what is perceived to be value for money.

Yes indeed Superbrands may be flawed in that if you don't pay you don't get recognised. But, at least the initial independent selection process ensures that not just any old unknown company can buy its way into Superbrand status.

I attended the Superbrands function last night where 80 plus companies were awarded Superbrand status and to all intents and purposes it was no different to the Cannes Awards, Loerie Awards, Sunday Times Top Brands Awards and London International Awards. When prizewinners were announced whoops of delight emanated from bosses and staff. Winners walked to the podium bursting with pride and beamed with delight when photographs were taken. Certificates were taken back to the office and proudly hung on walls.

And all the flaws aside, these whoops of delight, mutual backslapping and certificates on the walls all have tremendous value. Perhaps more than we dare realise and perhaps even to the extent of giving a really good return on investment

One cannot get away from that.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).
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