

Meet young judge Siyabonga Ngcobo

 By Jessica Tennant

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In the run-up to the 22nd Prism Awards taking place on Sunday, 14 April, we chatted to this year's cohort of young judges about their fresh approach to the judging process.

In this series of interviews, we find out what they've learnt working alongside the cluster judges and what their young minds bring to the table.

"This year's young judges' entries far exceeded expectation. The selected group is proof that there's an array of diverse and young talent in this industry and that they have a lot to offer," says co-convenor and founder of the Prisms Young Judges initiative, Palesa Madumo, executive director of strategy at Vuma Reputation Management.

Here, our interview with Siyabonga Ngcobo, marketing manager at Uber South Africa...

■ What does this recognition and opportunity mean to you?

A quote I was blessed to stumble across in my youth goes:

“ In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists. - Eric Hoffer ”

What this recognition and opportunity affords me is yet another opportunity to learn and grow. One of my greatest fears is complacency and I therefore live in the learning zone and constantly seek opportunities to be exposed to excellence that I can benchmark against. That being said, I am both grateful and honoured for the selection and feel compelled to make a meaningful contribution to both the awards and the industry at large.

■ Briefly tell us about your experience in the industry.

It has always been hard to take snapshots while on this rollercoaster I call my career, as the stills always come out blurry. I could be defined as a marketing oracle, having found my passion for the craft from pretty much the onset of my career.

My first foray into PR in particular was through DNA Brand Architects, a small agency at the time, steadfast in their stance against bland communications, where I truly got the chance to think outside the box and make 'wow stuff' happen for brands. This period of my life enabled me to have the audacity to accept nothing short of greatness in all my efforts.

Fast forward some years and having had exposure to a multitude of brands and industries, I found my niche in the realisation that I was particularly passionate about assisting international organisations to get the lay of the land and understand the African market, essentially retaining global best practices whilst leaning on local insights. This led to me honing this particular skillset and driving the marketing efforts for brands like BET Africa and a slew of other international television networks on the DStv platform and I am currently one of the custodians of the Uber brand in South Africa in my capacity as marketing manager.

■ Comment on the judging process.

The judging process was quite rigorous and emotional at times. The standard of work that was showcased spoke volumes



Siyabonga Ngcobo

of the calibre of talent that we have in this country, which added to the difficulty in judging. There were categories where we were truly conflicted and went back and forth deciding on a winner.

■ **What has the response been to this year's entries?**

The entries have been really impressive.

“ Contrary to popular belief, innovation is not all that it is heralded to be because innovation for innovation's sake is worthless. Great brands don't go out looking to innovate, however, they seek to solve real brand challenges and the solutions to those challenges then ultimately lead to innovations. ”

This year's entries have truly been steadfast in aiming to solve brand challenges, leading to some innovative work.

■ **What makes the winning work stand out?**

Winning work is work that delivers on all of its objectives as well as on the old cliché of 'cutting through the clutter'.

■ **Prisa also introduced the Student Campaign of the Year in 2016. Why do you think it's important that PR students are included in such initiatives?**

I am a big believer in the fact that exposure is the greatest key to unlocking potential. You can only aspire to be what you have been privy to and the earlier students are exposed to brand excellence, it allows them the ability to benchmark against the best that the country has to offer. Including the students in such initiatives also allows the young talent featured in this category the opportunity to start packaging and positioning themselves from the onset of their careers.

■ **What do you think young minds bring to the table?**

I believe that young minds bring a fresh perspective to the table. We are living in a young world and in order to progress, we need new ways of thinking to unlock new possibilities.

■ **What have you learnt working alongside the cluster judges?**

The greatest lesson has been commanding my seat at the table. My opinions, thoughts, insights, feelings and beliefs are worthy to be heard and I own that proudly.

■ **Comment on the past, present and future state of PR.**

Having witnessed the evolution of PR shift from drafting press releases and media drops, to being a cornerstone in the marketing communications value chain, it goes without saying that the future of PR is exciting.

“ The key to unlocking a reimagined PR landscape is amalgamating *sips Woolies water* both traditional and new media platforms when crafting brand narratives. ”

■ **What would the title of Prisms Young Judge for the 2019 awards mean to you?**

The title of Prisms Young Judge would be a tremendous honour as such accolades serve to reaffirm that one is on the right track.

■ **What are you most looking forward to in terms of this year's Awards?**

With the judging done and dusted, I am looking forward to being a part of the celebration of brand excellence.

As mentioned, the Awards take place this Sunday, 14 April. Follow us on [Twitter](#) for live updates on the night and visit our [Prism Awards special section](#) for other related content and of course all the winners following the announcement. Here's the link to our other [social media](#) pages, as well as the Prism Awards' [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts.

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