

Triggering the African storytellers' dream

 By Leigh Andrews

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If you're in any way involved in this industry, you're a natural storyteller, editor or reteller. If there's a story burning in your chest but you have no way to get it on the big screen, here's your chance...

On Wednesday, 15 July, Triggerfish Animation Studios and Disney launched their new African storytelling initiative in association with the department of trade and industry (dti) at the recently renovated River Club in Observatory.



A scene from *Khumba*

Close on 200 members of the media, production houses, scriptwriters and other creatives attended the session, surrounded by posters of Disney's African legends like *Khumba*, the half zebra, and characters from *Adventures in Zambezia*.

In the aptly-named 'Zambezi room', Stuart Forrest, CEO of Triggerfish, kicked off with a short video explaining the Triggerfish origins over the past 18 years and how they have attracted artists, directors and storytellers to become the continent's top production studio, having created the two aforementioned films seen across the world, made completely in Cape Town and having sold 19 million tickets worldwide.

Forrest said this was crucial in that it proved to the world that South Africa is capable of producing world-class talent. It's important to tell our stories, as the rest of the world needs to see other images coming from Africa than what the media reports on. We need to change the perception that it's all about the poverty single-story some see as the continent's profile.

And that's where you come in. Over the next twenty years, Triggerfish wants to work on a feature film every single year as well as TV series. They've put out a call for world-class stories that present endearing characters with the passion and perseverance to push it through. With Disney support and funding from the dti, this is the basis of the R44m pan-African Triggerfish Story Lab.

Uplifting African stories to change the world's perception of the continent

Christine Service of the Walt Disney Company SA said they are increasingly looking to the rest of world, especially Africa, and that they are excited to be involved in some of the judging of the project and offering winners the chance to sit with their experts in an immersion programme in Burbank, California. "The Story Lab provides a unique opportunity to discover this continent's next generation of storytellers," she explained.

Next, Forrest introduced Nelly Molokoane of the dti, which has been hugely helpful in recognising the importance of the film industry in the country. She mentioned that we need to tell stories of Africa, not only for Africa but for the whole world. Importantly, this has a spinoff for the tourism and textile and clothing industries too, so greatly enhances the economy.



Stuart Forrest, CEO of Triggerfish

Anthony Silverston, head of development at Triggerfish story lab, then spoke of [Africa's rich storytelling history](#). So let's go big and give the rest of the world something brimming with local flavour. Aspiring writers or directors of TV series or feature films are encouraged to send in a four-page synopsis for more information, and to submit an outline on triggerfish.com by 31 August 2015. In September the panel will select their favourites and in early November will announce a shortlist for the workshop, with the top six ultimately headed to Walt Disney Studios in Burbank for the immersion programme. Even better? They'll be paid for the projects.

What are they looking for?

In a Q&A session after the press conference, Triggerfish confirmed that they're not just looking for 'an African spin' on existing movies - they want something fresh and original, universal and character-driven, with an active hero audiences will care about. The story should be heart-warming and 'feel good'. You can submit up to three concepts. It's not just animal stories but must be animation-based.

Forrest concluded that their animations can be dubbed into 27 languages, that's why it's their passion. If it's yours too, visit www.triggerfishstudios.com for the full guidelines and online application form and see the promo video embedded below:

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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