

Creating an inclusive industry where youth can thrive

By [Neo Makhele](#), issued by [Ogilvy South Africa](#)

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I saw a headline a few weeks ago from a leading newspaper titled, "Where are the Youth?". It bemoaned a lack of young people working in key sectors of the economy - this got me thinking.

This Youth Month, the country celebrated the 44th anniversary of the June 16th uprising. However, we still suffer from massive youth unemployment and not enough meaningful economic participation for young people.

If you were to pose the challenge to our industry: "Where are the youth in the advertising communications industry", could we say they have opportunities, gainful employment and an impactful voice? This is an industry that thrives on youthful energy and has young people making up a significant part of its workforce. At Ogilvy, we have been deliberate and committed to the creation of an inclusive culture and made key investments in youth development. But we believe that, as one of the largest agencies in the industry, we need to do even more.

We have asked ourselves whether we are doing enough to listen to the voices of youth in our business. Diversity and inclusion are not just buzzwords at Ogilvy, they are part of our founding culture – it is critical to our vision to shape brands, businesses and culture. This has driven us to do more than create inclusiveness for this cohort of our staff – to create spaces and platforms for the youth in our business to have impact.



Neo Makhele, Chief Strategy Officer at Ogilvy

The nature of our business requires fresh insight, persistent challenges to the norm, new ways, divine discontent, activism as well as some experience and influence. Almost half of Ogilvy's workforce is under 35. That means we have a significant youth battalion – but are we deploying it optimally? Are our people's principles of "find them, grow them, keep them" finding true expression among the youth? We ran a people-assessment audit to find out. We learned that...

We are finding and attracting youth

We have invested in bursaries for unemployed youth via our partnership on the Rockstart programme. For 10 years, we have run an internship and graduate training programme to find and train talent in our industry.

About five years ago, we expanded the programme, boosting its rigour, scope and overall impact. Across Ogilvy South Africa, we recruit around 25 graduates a year in marketing communications and creative crafts. They spend a year learning through formal experiences and on-the-job training in key crafts such as strategy, creative, social media and account management. At the end of the programme, we hire about 75% of them. Called the O25 Graduate Programme, it is named less for the number of annual recruits, but for the age when our founder, David Ogilvy, became an account manager. It remains a reminder for us to harness the growth and ambition of our graduates and enable their career progression.

We needed to do more

We may be offering a best-in-class integrated programme across key crafts, exposing young people to key business and modern marketing capabilities. But what about their influence on our business? We offered inclusivity but did young people have the space to shape our agency? We challenged ourselves to broaden this area, and subsequently launched a series of programmes to do so.

The Youth Advisory Committee is a youth council that will report to the campus excos, formally amplifying the voices, strategic insights and cultural influence of young people at Ogilvy.

On Friday, 26 June, our youth led a discussion through our IG social pages tabling issues impacting them. Our first IG debate by our under-30s saw many of our executive leaders tuning in, gaining deeper insights into young people's feelings on representation, opportunity and empowerment.

While mentorship has always been a key part of our development approach, we are looking to include 'reverse mentorship' – where executives can gain understanding of youth trends, technology and progressive movements shaping our culture and business.

A key insight has been around the social construct of the youth in the workspace. Many young people feel their voices are constrained by inexperience, that they don't yet know enough to speak out. They fear being misunderstood and losing out on an opportunity. Listening to them reminded me that some may still be struggling to push through legacy attitudes to young people. To amplify their voices, we drew on the most important proof point of all – the work.

The work, the work, the work

MTV's '[Give HIV the middle finger](#)' (2017), KFC's '[Add Hope Nasty C](#)' (2018) and the '[NSRI sea rescue](#)' campaign (2017) were all Ogilvy O25-inspired and -created pieces. All received acclaim and were highly effective, with 'Give HIV the middle finger' winning a Cannes Lion in 2018.

This type of work is only made possible when youth have the space and opportunity to impact the system through their voices, talents and insights. This is the kind of work that enthuses us as a creative company, and such campaigns will continue to excite and inspire our youth to create work that matters for years to come. This is the work that helps Ogilvy to shape brands, businesses and culture.

As we close off Youth Month, we are grateful to have challenged ourselves and reflected on our contribution to the empowerment of youth in our industry. We salute all the young talent who have been through our 'teaching hospital' and enabled our legacy as a learning agency – especially the O25 graduates.

More recently, we have also been able to celebrate industry recognition for three Ogilvy stars. At the 2017 Prism Awards, Lameez Mohd was named Best Up and Coming Public Relations Professional at the age of 28. This year, she was named the Best PR Professional in the industry. Nicole Adolph, a junior strategic planner at the Ogilvy Johannesburg office, was appointed to the IAB Youth Action Council – an opportunity to learn from seasoned industry leaders. Hatsu Mphatsoe was an O25 graduate in 2017, and now an award-winning copywriter, who is judging her first Creative Circle Awards this year.

Our commitment to creating an extraordinary career path for our people requires a strong recruitment and development strategy, as well as a competitive transformation agenda. This is a journey of continuous, divine discontent. With every milestone we achieve, we recalibrate, set our sights even higher and work harder to achieve a more inclusive business and a culture that unlocks the full potential of the youth.

As Youth Month draws to an end, we hope these initiatives will continue to support youth development, keep us relevant, and nurture and enrich society with the talent and insight of the amazing young people we work with.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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