

Old friends, young talent at new agency

 By [Herman Manson: @marklives](#)

22 Mar 2012

Young talent from disadvantaged backgrounds, given a hand up and gaining real commercial experience so as to make them attractive in a competitive job market. This is the aim of three old(er) hands in advertising with a new commercial venture, [Old Friends Young Talent](#) (OFyt), that hopes to help transform the ad industry from the bottom up.



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OFyt is led by [Jono Shubitz](#), a former ECD of Ogilvy Cape Town and chairman of OgilvyOne and Ogilvy Interactive SA; [Gary Leih](#), a former group MD of Ogilvy South Africa, co-founder of ad agency [The White House](#), chairman and CEO of Ogilvy Group UK and an Ogilvy Worldwide board director, as well as president of the European Advertising Association; and [Paul Newman](#) who, after a career in banking at Barclays in London and with Banque Nationale de Paris, served as marketing director at Nationwide before launching his own ad agency [Amperzand](#).

Amperzand forms the basis of the OFyt, which is headquartered in the old Post Office in Muizenberg, Cape Town, close to the beach and the train station. Clients include security firm ADT and Henry Tayler & Ries, a player in the southern African alcohol distribution market.



L-R Paul Newman, Gary Leih and Jono Shubitz.

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BEE has failed its economic transformation task

Shubitz, Leih and Newman have known each other for decades and have worked together on and off for many years. The trio felt, as many South Africans do, that BEE has failed in its task of economic transformation by keeping the money circulating at the top, with little benefit trickling down below senior management and shareholder level.

Shubitz is frank when he says they are building a legacy with OFyt - one that will see them playing a meaningful role in transforming the advertising industry beyond shareholdings by

the rich and connected.

The idea for OFyt was inspired by their involvement with [Learn to Earn](#), a non-profit skills development and job creation organisation which trains unemployed people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds in market-relevant skills.

One such course is a foundation course in graphic design - taught in Khayelitsha - with curriculum assistance from the University of Stellenbosch. The challenge has been to take these design students and train them to operate effectively in a professional agency environment.

Real projects, real clients, real deadlines

OFyt offers one-year internships where the youngsters gain experience in a commercial agency environment, working on real projects for real clients with real deadlines, after which they should have the skills required to seek employment in any agency in South Africa.

"We give them a background in a commercial environment," says Newman. "They are already good designers."

Interns are assessed in their second month, after which a stipend of R2000/pm kicks in, plus travel costs; after four months the stipend increases to R4000/pm; and after six months to R6000/pm.



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The agency has taken on eight interns, works closely with four freelancers and has a permanent professional team of 10, including the three founders. Clients put their project briefs into the agency system, the interns are split into groups and, under the guidance of the full-time OFyt team and a selection of well-established freelancers, come up with strategic and creative solutions. This is then fine-tuned and goes into production under direction of the senior staff members.

Partnered with companies

OFyt has also partnered with companies such as [Quirk](#) and [Lange PR](#) to collaborate as needed on different projects.

OFyt Trust, created at inception of the agency, will hold 26% of the equity of OFyt in perpetuity, and proceeds will be used to educate and support young, historically disadvantaged talent on an ongoing basis. A profit scheme runs on top of the trust to ensure all staff members benefit from employment at OFyt.

The young talent is infusing their work with township culture, which will contribute to developing a [South African identity and flavour](#) for locally produced advertising, moving it away from its current European and US bias towards something more regionally authentic as was developed in South America or India, says Leih.

Shubitz agrees, calling the SA industry an "advertising colony" stuck on winning awards in New York or London, when consumers would much rather engage with messaging based in their own culture.

Positive client feedback

Client feedback on the initiative has been positive, says Shubitz, and while the project is ambitious, the founding partners believe their business objectives remain realistic.

Shubitz, Leih and Newman are building their legacy, but also, none of them has an urge to sit at home twiddling their thumbs, and what's more, they want to work and have fun.

Young talent requires guidance and nurturing - something that often falls away in the fast-paced world of advertising. Who better then to provide this than old friends, whose passion for what they do still burns strong and whose entrepreneurial spirit will hopefully inspire [young guns](#) to follow in their footsteps and do it for themselves?

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