

WPP Africa Academy: When the sum is greater than the whole

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

12 Feb 2016

The creative economy is important as service industries lead the economy, and also support the wider economy in terms of progress and growth. However, to grow the creative economy it needs to transform. Training is a way of achieving this.



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Recognising this, WPP launched its WPP Africa Academy in Johannesburg on 10 February 2016. Alec Graham, a WPP global client operations director, who led the creation of the Academy, says the core mission of WPP is to develop talent and to work together to grow talent to the benefit of our people, our agencies and our clients. “The Academy makes good business sense, and is good not only for our employees but also for our suppliers and clients, as well as the broader economy.”

“The idea of a WPP Africa Academy came about in the middle of last year, during a meeting of the WPP South African CEOs where we discussed common issues and themes. Training came out as a priority,” he says.

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It was clear, he adds, that there were challenges in developing talent and training as well as issues with SETA submissions and transformation. “It was felt that we could maximize benefit from the group by sharing and applying knowledge in an efficient and effective way. While this would be cost effective, this is not the end goal - the end goal is the development of talent for the region and continent.”

As a result, he spent a lot of time talking to people as well as immersing himself in understanding Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and the Triple BEE Scorecard needs and internships and training for Previously Disadvantaged Individuals (PDI).

“Key throughout this is our support of the transformation agenda. This is about more than the scorecard or a tick box to obtain a ratings certificate at the end of the year; it is about fostering an attitude and approach to business, employees and talent development that will lead to transformation.”

Robyn de Villiers, chairman and CEO of Burson-Marsteller and a member of the Academy Steering Committee, also emphasises transformation. “From a South African perspective BEE and transformation are important and a clear way to make a contribution is to upskill and train staff.”

However, while the Academy started off as a South African initiative, the Committee very quickly realized that it needed to go beyond this country, to be an Africa wide initiative. This, says de Villiers is very exciting. “By 2040 Africa will have the biggest group of working age people on the planet; greater than China and India. But this is only an advantage if our people are skilled.”

The result is a training academy that will provide and promote training across Africa, including all WPP companies and affiliates across the continent, with training hubs in Nairobi, Kenya and Lagos, Nigeria.

The training comprises a lot of online training, in combination with real individual tuition support through a tutor that engages with the student to assist them as needed. The Academy also includes training WPP has developed elsewhere.

“We have an existing relationship with the Red & Yellow School of Logic and Magic (Red & Yellow) and it made sense to extend our existing relationship with them and so we are working closely with them developing programmes for the Academy,” Graham says.

The WPP Africa Academy is WPP’s third education initiative globally, following earlier initiatives in China and India. In 2015, WPP in partnership with the Indian School of Design and Innovation (ISDI), launched the ISDI WPP School of Communication in Mumbai, creating India’s first professional three-year undergraduate diploma program in communication. In 2011, WPP partnered with the Shanghai Arts and Design Academy (SADA) to establish the WPP School of Marketing and Communications in China.

The WPP Group currently employs more than 30,000 people through its agencies and partners in South Africa alone, with offices in a further 20 countries across the continent.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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