Ad agencies ought to be intimate with clients to thrive

By Walter Wafula

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MetropolitanRepublic, a newcomer in Uganda's advertising industry became the first local agency to win an award at this year's Loeries in September. MetropolitanRepublic won bronze for their 2012 MTN Uganda campaign, (David Dumba) which was aimed at promoting SIM card registration in the country. Alex Rukundo, the managing director MRU speaks about the award and the value that intimacy brings to advertising business.



Alex Rukundo

MetropolitanRepublic became the first Ugandan agency to win at the prestigious Loerie Awards, how do you feel about this accomplishment?

Alex Rukundo: It is a great honour especially as a young agency, we set our sights on making new and better standards in the industry and the award demonstrates our vision of advertising in Uganda and what we hope to do in the market.

Who came up with the winning David Ddumba concept and how do you plan to reward the talent?

Rukundo: The idea was a group effort from the team. The Loerie Award was a big enough reward for the team.

This achievement comes less than a year after you started operations in Uganda. What does it mean for MetropolitanRepublic going forward?

Rukundo: We want to set a new standard of advertising in Uganda and going forward we want to win the Gold and many other international Awards.

What value can your customers expect from this kind of achievement?

Rukundo: This achievement demonstrates the potential of our capabilities as an agency and the level of advertising and marketing solutions we offer. Most importantly, it clearly says that with insightful, well thought-through communication there can be behavioural change that influences people's behaviour for better.

The Loerie Awards happen on an annual basis. How do you plan to maintain your winning position?

Rukundo: At the back-end we have a highly supportive structure out of MetropolitanRepublic South Africa that has had a culture of winning international awards for the past six years. Paul Warner's a legend and visionary and therefore his vision rings true into everything we do.

Locally, by keeping the great team that we have at the moment and also being open to discovering new talent and continuing to understand and analyse the market. Most important for a nascent market like ours, we must mentor, grow and shape talent to think about new, impactful ways of communicating, however big or small a brief.

- ***Uganda's adverting industry is in its infancy but picking up very fast. However, there's stiff competition for accounts which forced agencies like ZK Advertising to close shop. How do you plan to survive the storm in the market?***

Rukundo: We will continue to develop our partnerships and maintain our relationships with our clients by ensuring we execute good business practices as we move further.

I personally, strongly believe in agencies having souls. When you have strong intimacy for a client's business, you make it your own and hence ensure the delivery is strong, the relationship rock-solid and the outcome, great.

- ***What are some of the key lessons you have learnt by operating in Uganda's advertising industry so far?***

Rukundo: As much as MetropolitanRepublic Uganda is a young agency, the core team has been in this industry for a long time and as such we have a holistic understanding of the Ugandan market, knowing that the market is ever-evolving, we also constantly seek new talent, and we recently had a job ad in the newspapers where we had a massive response.

Another important lesson's to ensure you diversify your portfolio of clients, but also ensure you always strive to deliver the best thereby gain credibility with a solid reputation.

- ***Are there any loopholes you have identified and what solutions are needed to make the industry better?***

Rukundo: There's still a nascent way of clients giving business to agencies and general corporate corruption that inhibits truly competitive bidding and pitching for business. Luckily society is evolving and by extension the entities that live in it. We also have an ad agency association that's helping, slow-but-sure, drive professionalisation of the industry and this will go along way in building us.

Additionally, an educational process should be carried out to make the market more aware of what the agencies role is and what their value is to the client and the consumer.

- ***Kampala City Council Authority is not happy with the order of outdoor advertising in the city. What's your view about the move to reduce the number of still billboards in Kampala?***

Rukundo: Kampala is definitely cluttered and unplanned and I fully support the plan to professionalise and beautify Kampala and the rest of Uganda in any way possible. You only have to look at Outdoor planning in other cities to get an idea of what needs to be done.

- ***Would you support the sharing of billboard space by advertising agencies as an alternative?***

RukundoYes, in fact that would add value and reduce the clamour for space and reduce the amount of clutter.

- ***Lastly, any piece of advice to an agency that would like to win at the Loeries next year?***

Rukundo: Insightful communication is critical, but think beyond just an Ad. Think of a creative solution to a human problem and win!

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