

Have more fun and exit the safe zone

 By Leigh Andrews

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The African Cristal 2015 Awards showed a high level of predictability in SA films, says Alistair King, Chief Creative Officer of King James Group, but all is not lost - we simply need to use our own subject matter...

King James Group came out on top at this year's African Cristal Awards, cinching the 'advertising agency of the year' title as well as winning big for the Johnnie Walker Gentleman's Wager integrated campaign and others for Santam/Sanlam work. Who better to share some insights into the state of African advertising than Alistair King, Chief Creative Officer of King James Group?

[King attended last year](#) and was blown away by the African Cristal Awards. He found the ceremony and conference itself slick and organised, but it was the work and the judges he met from across Africa that really impressed him. It was a remarkable week of meeting fellow creatives, and he came away with a really good sense of the breadth, depth and diversity of African advertising. With 19 African countries having entered this year, King feels that certainly provides a good cross-section of the continent's work.

King shares further insights...

■ **1. Well done on winning 'agency of the year' as well as for individual campaigns - tell us what the wins mean for the agency.**

King: It's always debatable what winning creative awards mean for any agency, and the African Cristals is no different. We enter because the work is done, and we'd like to see where we sit relative to the rest of the continent. This result is really just affirmation that we're doing OK, and if an international marketer happens to have one eye on the results, we're pleased to have our hand in the air.



The team behind the Johnnie Walker Gentleman's Wager integrated campaign

■ **2. Give us some insight into how the continent is understanding the concept of integrated/cross-platform.**

King: Some nations are more developed than others, obviously, but generally speaking everyone is doing what they can to create a richer brand experience. I do think South Africa is doing this particularly well right now. Our clients are embracing it and I think its freeing up the creative product beautifully. I'm not sure that marketers in the rest of Africa are committing

the kind of resources needed to be really creatively ambitious on digital platforms. That will change.

■ **3. As this is an African award ceremony, elaborate on the SA advertising standard compared to rest of the continent as we near the end of 2015.**

King: [I said it last year](#), Egypt is wiping the floor with us in Film. I came home feeling that our work was uptight and self-conscious, and in something of a 'tempo' rut. There's a high degree of predictability in our films, in how they look, sound and feel, and Egypt's work made me rethink what we're doing in King James. Funnily enough, [Ali Ali, a really great Egyptian director](#) echoed that when we were judging Loeries. Apart from that, I feel that South Africa is right at the top when it comes to most categories. We have a very high degree of craft and whatever we do always looks elegant. We just need to lighten up and have more fun. We seem to be stuck in that safe zone.

■ **4. Then, how does work from the continent compare globally? What's our major competitive edge?**

King: I think our major competitive edge is one we're not really using - our very essence and our very own subject matter. Our ads are filled with global ideas instead of us focusing on what is unique and what is singularly fascinating about us. We seem nervous of the things that make us different. Show the world something they could never see on their own turf and we might start competing.

[Click here](#) for the full African Cristal 2015 prize lists, [here for a reminder](#) of King's sentiments about African Cristal 2014, and [here](#) for Publicis Africa CEO Kevin Tromp's view of this year's awards.

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