

Mentoring the next generation - a challenge to the SA creative industry

 By [Brianna Graves](#)

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There is no doubt that South Africa's advertising industry is already present on the world stage. The Rainbow Nation is home to the world's most-awarded campaign (TBWA's Trillion Dollar *Zimbabwean* Campaign), a D&AD Black Pencil and many Cannes accolades.



In fact, success through the years by SA agencies such as Net#work BBDO, King James, Joe Public, Bester Burke Slingsers, Ogilvy and more contributed to South Africa's 2011 ranking as the 13th most-awarded country at Cannes.

Prepare for the future

But are those leading the industry doing everything possible to prepare for the future and to ensure a continued and well-established presence on that world stage?

It has been nearly a year since I spent a month immersed in the South African ad industry. Joburg, Cape Town, Durban and Port Elizabeth all played host to [The Saturn Return Project](http://www.thesaturnreturnproject.com) (www.thesaturnreturnproject.com) as I traveled about in search of conversation to inform the state of the SA industry and its adaptation to change in the shifting landscape of increasing media diversity.

After that month, as I boarded a plane to leave that great nation (which was admittedly painful; I did not want to go), I felt assured that the future was bright. Innovative ideas are born in SA of necessity, of the realities of life and survival, and at the intersection of countless cultural perspectives.

Something was lacking

But something was lacking. A certain pride in SA's international reputation and representation, and a strong outside connection were missing.

Sure, most (if not all) of the multinational players are present with an inherent connection to their global networks. Sure, there is an active Twitter and social media community allowing some networking and relationships to develop with peers worldwide. And sure, it was and is partly a literal connection challenge, as the country lacks the physical infrastructure to match internet capability and potential in other parts of the world.

But as TBWA\Durban's [Justin McCarthy](#) explained to me, that will all change dramatically by 2014. A mere two years from now, SA will have as strong or a stronger infrastructure than most of the first world.

So I ask you: is your ad industry prepared to leverage this?

Fully supported junior talent

The answer is not unless your junior talent is fully supported to step boldly into this future.

As I traveled from city to city, I asked about the industry networking communities outside of any one particular agency. The consistent response I received was that there was not a strong ad community in any of the cities I visited. Efforts to mentor were specifically at the discretion of each agency.

In such a framework, how are junior creatives to learn and push themselves to grow? From where shall they source their inspiration?

Looking west to model ideas, channel strategies and executions is not the right approach. Leaving the industry for greener pastures in London or Australia, New Zealand or Europe won't do the trick. The answers that will work best in SA are already right there in SA. Nurture them. Represent the industry proudly and mentor the youth coming up through the ranks looking for guidance from those who have "been there and done that".

Portfolio Night

On 23 May 2012, in every major city around the world, top creative directors will sit down with aspiring talented juniors in the world's largest simultaneous portfolio review. This event, now in its 10th edition and known as "Portfolio Night" (www.portfolionight.com; [@PortfolioNight](#)) and started by I HAVE AN IDEA president and founder Ignacio Oreanuno (.) and his teams, has helped countless juniors to find jobs and countless creative directors to discover and connect with up-and-coming local talent.

Nearly every continent (Antarctica has escaped us) and more than 35 countries have played host to Portfolio Night. But one country, and its world-class cities, has never participated: South Africa.

With the potential for the industry that is just on the horizon and the talent among the agencies with roots in the Rainbow Nation, how is this possible?

It is the responsibility of SA's creative leadership to cultivate the talent of tomorrow. To ensure that they have the tools, the feedback, the knowledge and the hunger to create the next great campaigns to shift behaviors, change perspectives, create awareness and, of course, sell products. That campaign that will be seen worldwide, at Cannes and in London, in New York, Los Angeles, Sydney, Shanghai and Amsterdam with the qualification of "Made in South Africa."

Who will step up to the plate?

The question is who will step up to the plate to represent Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban on the same global stage that will connect the worldwide creative community in May? I challenge you, South Africa, to answer this question.

I have been welcomed in your beautiful country before and I know what you're creatively capable of. But it's simply no longer acceptable to leave a void where SA should be.

We don't want to do Portfolio Night without you.

ABOUT BRIANNA GRAVES

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