

South Africa's state of creativity

By  Emily Stander

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The One Club's Creative Week is five days dedicated to giving creative leaders and pioneers an online platform to come together and discuss issues, changes and ideas across different industries. Today, I report on a panel hosted on Thursday, 10 June about the state of creativity in South Africa.



Neo Mashigo, Ann Nurock, Xolisa Dyeshana and Camilla Clerke

Hosted by Bizcommunity and The Creative Circle, the Global Media Talks, SA session was led by Ann Nurock, the panel discussed the unique challenges and opportunities that South Africans bring to the creative table. The full panel included:

- Xolisa Dyeshana: chief creative officer at Joe Public United
- Camilla Clerke: executive creative director at Ogilvy
- Neo Mashigo: chief creative officer at M&C Saatchi

See the link to the full webinar below this article

Effective advertising, branding and marketing uses experiences and stories to connect with audiences - and South Africa truly has a distinctive way of storytelling. Though it has a deeply tragic past, South Africa boasts a rich and diverse cultural landscape. With 11 official languages, the most in the world, there is no one true way to tell the South African story - which presents its own challenges. The panel for Creative Week looked at what 'unique storytelling' means in the South African context, the importance of purpose-driven work and how the advertising landscape has been changing.

Purpose-driven work

Purpose-driven work speaks to the idea that companies take issues and topics which are important to the consumer and use it effectively in their brand campaigns.

In South Africa, there is no shortage of social issues which are close to the heart of the people. This can be used to great effect by popular brands to make a stand and speak to these issues as they align with the brand's messaging. Carling Black Label's #NoExcuse campaign which they did in collaboration with Ogilvy is an excellent example of speaking to a prominent issue in the country - gender based violence - and using their audience power to send an important message.

"People have managed to truly connect with brands, because they align with the causes," said Clerke. "I think it has turned brands into the more authentic version of themselves."

According to Mashigo, the consumer is more interested in brands that are interested in bringing about change in society. Particularly in South Africa, it makes sense for brands to refocus and see how these issues align with the purpose of the brand. "People want to see the authentic engagement in purpose-driven work", he said.

The financial sector, for example, has become about helping the consumer in terms of handling their finances instead of making it a situation where they are trying to get people to spend more. "Financial literacy in the country is one of the places where opportunities exist for brands to engage and help," said Mashigo.

Inspiration in South Africa often comes from the people who live here. Dyeshana said, "South Africans, just by nature, are some of the most creative people that are out there, despite all the challenges. I was often asked which brand won during the Covid-19 pandemic and every time my answer used to be 'the people'." In the context of brands that want to be relevant, they need to find a way to align themselves to things that the people of South Africa care about. It's no longer about merely trying to sell a product, but truly caring about the general health of the country. Campaigns that truly connect with this concept are most likely to be successful.

South African authenticity

Making a stand or sending a message through campaigns is only effective when accompanied by true authenticity. According to Dyeshana, there has been a rising trend over the last few years which has started to give the work of South Africa an aesthetic that is unique to its people. Showing this has truly helped transcend stereotypes and consumers are

responding well to this idea because they can see themselves in the realness.

“We have a very unique humour and I think it’s about time it gets shared,” said Clerke. She expressed that in the past, branding has focused on strong universal truths. Now, however, branding is more focused on truths which are pertinent to South Africans - and this brings out true authenticity.

This is not a unique trait of branding and advertising, however, as a lot of inspiration comes from the consumer. Mashigo mentioned that brands need to negotiate the approval process and how they can be quicker about making decisions - because they might get left behind by the consumer who creates and posts on social media.

What they are getting right, however, is making themselves more relatable. “What I’m loving the most right now is how our different brands can lead us to better work,” said Mashigo. He continued to say that brands are becoming more human due to the banter which is starting to arise between them. This is an effective way to further connect with the consumer - and this connection creates a strong precedent for brands to effectively spread their message and understand what the people of South Africa want.

Nando’s and Chicken Licken are two iconic brands in South Africa. Nando’s specifically has been a giant of excellent advertising. “[Nando’s] allowed us to actually break the rules, it’s a brand that is happy to go anywhere you take it,” said Mashigo. They are interested in causing conversations with consumers and bring these conversations to the forefront. Together with Nando’s, Chicken Licken continues pushing these boundaries with a unique way of storytelling.

For example, Chicken Licken recently released an advertisement which plays on the classic series *Knight Rider* for their sliders. In the advertisement, we see Michael Nyathi cruising the streets of Mzansi in Kitt - making it intrinsically South African through a unique twist on the original.

This advertisement is exceptional at what it does - bringing out the uniqueness of South African storytelling while still relating to something which comes from a different culture. An essential idea when brands think about campaigning in this country.

Unique storytelling

South Africa’s story comes from the socio-economic reality it finds itself in. This country has seen extreme pain and tragedy, but its people have taken it upon themselves to find a way through using humour. “When you’re living in a country that was as divided as we were, as restricted as we were, you have to find creative ways to find your way around,” said Dyeshana. He said that a brilliant avenue for expression in this country is social media.

People are able to create something which connects with the rest of the country - something that everybody wants to and can be a part of. Jerusalema, for example, became an international phenomenon - and is a beautiful tribute to the way South Africans find joy despite what may be happening around them.

“If you can laugh during tough times, you allow the space to come up with solutions,” said Mashigo. This attitude, he believes, is how South Africans always believe they will come out alright on the other side. This is also the way campaigns can be successful - by bouncing off of this humour. Finding the light side is the way we like to bring ourselves back to normality.

What are the challenges facing the global and SA Creative industries?

Although there are many positives about being part of the creative industry in South Africa, there are some significant challenges which make it difficult to be authentic to brand messaging.

For Clerke, the biggest challenge is the relatively small client base which exists against the comparatively many agencies. “What happens is the importance of appeasing the client becomes more valued than the creative work,” she said. When you’re constantly trying to hold onto the client rather than put out the best work that you know, the situation becomes dangerous for the brand.

“You’ve got a lot of clients sending tips through to the creatives and that’s not what they’re there to do. It makes the work a bit lukewarm, it makes the agencies afraid. You sometimes feel like if you don’t do what the client says, you could lose the client, lose the business, lose money, lose creatives. That’s not what this should be about, it should be about the work,” said Clerke. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that there are too few clients for the amount of agencies who are available to help them with their needs.

“In many ways, it highlights that we’re not doing enough of the work that we were speaking about earlier to persuade enough clients to give us the freedom we know needs to be done in order to make their brands successful,” added Dyeshana.

Covid-19 has made some clients braver, but it has also made many clients more wary of taking the risks which are so often necessary for success. “The greatest antidote to that is to use the few pockets of clients that are allowing agencies to really bring the value that they can bring without the threat that they’ll go to somebody else.” said Dyeshana. “I think we need to create more and more of those case studies so we can really start to turn the tide.”

For Magisho, the pitch process is a challenge as it is counter-intuitive to the creative process. The frequency of pitching, in

terms of building a brand, is particularly important. “You need to have consistency to understand each other and how you work the brand and work with the consumer,” he said. Secondly, figuring out what needs to be brought out from the pitching process needs more attention.

Dyeshana believes that a more united front is the key to solving the challenges agencies face in advertising and branding. “The idea of having the business people on one side and having the creative people sitting on one side is not going to get us far in terms of structurally starting to relook at some of these things we need to look at,” he said.

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

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