

# EXCLUSIVE: Punk'd out of ATL funk



By Herman Manson: @marklives

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[Alistair King](#), group creative director of the [King James Group](#), doesn't bother to hide his enthusiasm for the latest, possibly bravest, move within his agency to further define its offering in a competitive market, where budgets are shifting from above-the-line to integrated campaigns and what was traditionally considered below-the-line work.



King ([@alsparkles](#)) [recently introduced](#) Michael Udell, formerly deputy MD at DDB South Africa, and Matt Ross ([@matthewsross](#)), a former ECD from the same agency, to King James Group, where they will be responsible for positioning the agency group's strategic and creative offering somewhere between 'traditional' and 'digital' advertising - the spot King believes modern communications needs to be.

[Udell](#) was the founder and MD of Tribal DDB SA before it merged with its affiliate DDB South Africa in 2011, while [Ross](#) was the ECD.

## Break down any silos

Ross becomes ECD at King James, while Udell becomes integration officer for the group. Their brief is to break down any silos in the creative and strategic thinking of the agency and to bridge gaps between the various divisions within in the group.

They will also be heading the digital business, formerly [Mnemonic](#), with [Bruce Wright](#). Mnemonic has been rebranded as Punk, a reference to challenging convention and an acknowledgement that brands no longer control every aspect of their message. Punk, while a division within King James, will play a larger strategic role across the group and its clients, influencing all aspects of King James' work, says King, and will only be separate from the rest of the agency via its outward ID.

King believes Punk will help transform his agency group and gives it and its clients a real advantage over competitors.

Ross says their strategy has been informed by the media-agnostic nature of modern advertising. While ATL advertising still sets many local and global brand strategies, to the benefit of their agencies, clients are losing out and their brands will suffer long-term consequences.

## Focus on conceptual

Digital agencies have traditionally focused on tactical work, says Udell, whereas Punk will focus on the conceptual and outsource production to knowledgeable specialists. Punk will stand on three pillars, namely, strategy, creativity and knowledge of technology. Technology is changing too fast to ensure every single skill can be honed in-house, says Udell.

Udell says digital evangelists have lost sight of where consumers are leading communication. The solutions offered by these evangelists have been technology-led, rather than being based on consumer insights. The balances between the various aspects of marketing keep changing - and will continue to do so, based on consumer behaviour.

Wright, meanwhile, describes a lot of digital work as reactionary - like creating an app because everybody else without any sound strategy behind such a move. Punk will instead position digital as the glue that binds together communication strategies.

Experiences are more powerful than being told something, says Udell, and technology provides multiple tools with which to create experiences, but they need to be strategically sound and based on consumer insights to be effective. Brands are also now competing with consumer-generated content, which is why some, such as Coca-Cola and Red Bull, are increasingly moving budget towards creating great and engaging content.

## Facilitate a 'meeting of minds'

In terms of his job as integration officer, Udell says he will use digital to link all the companies in the group, and aims to ensure strategic thinking is aligned across all of them, keeping in mind that great ideas has multiple consumer touchpoints, from PR to eventing. In short, he hopes to facilitate a 'meeting of minds' across divisions on strategic solutions for King James' clients. It will mean looking at incoming briefs holistically and then picking appropriate teams to implement touchpoints.

All the creative, digital and social media teams will be sitting together to ensure ideas flow freely through the King James Group.

Punk is supposed to be more than a King James agency division - it will challenge conventional thinking across the group's agencies and aims to ensure a meeting of minds that breaks through all those agency silos. If it works, it's because the two new faces tasked with transforming the way the agency thinks strategically has senior management buy-in, and buy in from the multiple entrepreneurs that operates the various communication agencies that make up the integrated company.

Step on toes they will, inevitably, as punks must, but on their success depends the sustainability of the [good times](#) King James is experiencing at the moment.

## Interesting, relevant, challenging

King and his business partner [James Barty \(@jbarts101\)](#) are following the money, and it's leading them away from ATL, and the success they have enjoyed there, into a much more interesting and relevant, not to mention challenging, communications environment. Punk indeed.

## ABOUT HERMAN MANSON: @MARKLIVES

The inaugural Vodacom Social Media Journalist of the Year in 2011, Herman Manson (@marklives) is a business journalist and media commentator who edits industry news site [www.marklives.com](#). His writing has appeared in newspapers and magazines locally and abroad, including Bizcommunity.com. He also co-founded *Brand* magazine.

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