

SA's creative awards... They're our Golden Calves*

By [Mike Silver](#)

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We've all been there. The shortlists are announced, the chatter begins and the creative industry suddenly forgets to eat, sleep or Instagram their latest sunset. Awards fever is upon us.

A number of times each year the industry goes into complete meltdown as mass hysteria and self-obsession take over. Simply put; the potential to win awards has the incredible ability to minimise the threats of global warming and nuclear war (for a few weeks at least).

Having worked in the UK, the South African creative industry seems close to obsessed with these little metallic trophies. The opportunity to be recognised by your peers and be told that you are actually as good as you think you are would appear to be critical.



*Golden Calf (noun) 1. (Old Testament) an idol made by Aaron for the Israelites to worship; destroyed by Moses; it is now used to refer to anything worshipped undeservedly. (Source: www.vocabulary.com)

But is the system flawed? The system that has agencies on judging panels of awards in which their own work is being judged. The one that seemingly encourages clients (and their agencies) to develop campaigns with the sole purpose of winning an award? The one that awarded non-existent CSI campaigns to cellular giants and their agency? The one that has costly and intensive entrance requirements that favour large agencies.

Defeating the purpose

If we lived in a utopian creative universe where our target market was 6 billion skinny jeans-wearing, round spectacle-sporting, Christmas jumper-donning agency folk, then this whole system might make sense. The fact is we have target markets that

need to be spoken to effectively and impactfully. Creating a little activation in some low footfall upper LSM environment for the agency team to high five over at their local craft beer haunt kind of defeats the purpose of marketing. You've executed an idea to win an award for you and your client's CV; not to convince consumers and ultimately sell a product.

Let's apply the above principle to other industries. Looking at sport, one might say it's the equivalent of not recognising the team most effective at winning matches but rather the team whose peers thought performed the best trick during a game or wore the most daring uniform. Applying this arguably insular philosophy of recognition to politics, it would be a bit like focusing on the candidate who delivered the most impressive speech on a campaign trail (according to other politicians) vs the candidate who actually won people over and took first place in the election.

Communication is the aim

Creativity is critical and it should never be minimised in the face of profit. But that being said, there are places for 'beautiful things'; film and the arts as just two examples. Ultimately at the heart of any marketing campaign is a communication objective. Achieve this and you have delivered on the brief and resulted in helping a client achieve business objectives (e.g. market recognition or sales). I'm not sure a shiny trophy does this outside of creative circles.

Before I finish, I think it's important to point out the importance of awards like Apex and the relatively new Student Village Makoya Awards. These awards are centred on marketing *effectiveness*. While creativity plays a role, it is the ability of that creative to move consumers (not judges) that is a critical measure. The Makoya Awards take an interesting stance in that a number of categories are driven by consumer (student) research only. This 'jury system' is a layman's barometer... the same laymen to whom we try sell products.

So, just like when Moses came down Mount Sinai to see his fellows praying to an idolised (but powerless) golden calf I think it's about time we began questioning the sway these little bits of tin have over our industry and what true recognition looks like.

ABOUT MIKE SILVER

Mike Silver is the founder of Elevator, a brand experience agency now part of the Smollan Group. Mke has been working in the below-the-line and brand experience arena since 2000. Current clients include Lipton Ice Tea, Old Mutual and Pernod Ricard.

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