

Make the circle bigger: Growing an agency with startup clients

 By [James Wilson](#)

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At the recent 2016 MTN App of the Year Awards, the premier app development event in South Africa, our client, Kaching, won App of the Year in the Lifestyle Category for Most Innovative App. This isn't the first time one of the startups we represent has won App of the Year - last year it was M4JAM.

Now, this isn't about bragging about awards (OK, maybe a little bit), but rather about the role startups have played in the growth and development of our agency and the role they DO play in the growth of the broader marketing and communications sector.

WE has an impressive array of blue-chip multinationals on its books and, to be perfectly honest, we entered into the startup space purely by chance.

Startups have distinctly different communication requirements compared to more established brands. They pretty much have one chance of getting it right. Sometimes they'll receive a stay of execution, but they need to be accurate and mercenary with their marketing spend and their go-to-market strategy. They are also more project- than retainer-based, and typically don't have large budgets. However, the experience and opportunities they provide their communication partners are priceless.

Oh, the places you'll go!

What's great about working with startups is that you're working with individuals who think out of the box – and who doesn't benefit from sharing headspace with an out-the-box thinker? It's not just about the app or solution you've been approached to publicise from scratch; it's about the energy, excitement and raw ambition that forces different thinking – so often associated with entrepreneurs.



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Invariably, the PR 'deliverable' for the startup is restricted to a three-month profiling campaign, a launch and a robust understanding of the industry you're operating in. The successful project proposal has to be punchy, impactful and noticeable.

All this drives better consultancy, but mostly it really forces the agency to think of the audience they are talking to and the competitor they are trying to beat. And whilst this may sound really obvious, there are a plethora of multinationals out there that are too inwardly focused, not thinking about their differentiator, nor aware of what's going on in their market sector. This is why working for a startup is not only healthy for us, but also rewarding for our other clients. It wasn't that long ago that Uber and Airbnb were embryonic ideas, just waiting to erupt. It's also these disruptor brands (apps and innovative solutions) that ultimately lead the market.

Whilst South Africa doesn't have the startup venture capital the US has (a topic for another day), what we do have is the startup mentality and a nation teeming with young, dynamic entrepreneurs, all feverishly working around the clock on the next big thing.

So, the next time you're approached by a startup with a lean budget, think about the skills you'll develop and learn and how this next-generation thinking can benefit other clients in your stable.

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ABOUT JAMES WILSON

James is a communications and marketing specialist with more than 17 years' experience. He has worked in agencies and in-house, giving him the full scope of agency and client life...

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