

Tackling diversity, ageism and paying for creative ideas

By Ann Nurock

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Ann Nurock interviews Kevin Swanepoel, CEO of The One Club at the One Show in New York to find out what the non-profit organisation has been up to over the last year.

Nurock: *Kevin, it is really good to be back attending The One Club, One Show Creative Week for the fourth year. So, tell me, what has happened in the last year with The One Club?*

Swanepoel: Ann, really it has been one of those years where we have gone from strength to strength. What I find interesting is that when Publicis just over a year ago decided they were going to take a year off from awards, we all panicked and thought that this would be the end and it has not been. In fact, this particular year, it's the second highest number of entries we have ever had and obviously with that, the revenue has been great for us. What we do with the revenue is even more important because as you know as a non-profit we give back to the industry and this has allowed us to do a lot more in the way of diversity and gender equality.



Kevin Swanepoel, CEO of The One Club



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Nurock: *I know that this is one award show that really does have a lot of purpose in terms of diversity and education, so what specifically have you done in the last year with regard to enhancing them?*

Swanepoel: So the inclusion and diversity boot camps that we do globally and in South Africa will go into their fifth year this year, which is such a tremendous feat, helping the young diverse generation not only in South Africa but around the world in 18 cities and five different countries. We've just added Mexico this year, so there is a lot on the go there.



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One thing that I am super proud of is that we are just about to launch a big gender programme this fall and it is going to be like our Creative Summit and our Creative Leaders' Summit, but it is going to be focused on how we bring more gender equality into the business. It's going to be an invitation-only event; very small, 100 people only – 50 women, 50 men – and they will be the top decision makers in the industry. Our goal is to try and help, from a senior management perspective, open up the agencies to allow for more gender-balanced teams – all the way from senior management to the juniors coming in.



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■ **Nurock:** *I think that's amazing. Do you think gender equality and diversity are improving in the industry?*

Swanepoel: Without a doubt they are and I actually think that the industry is doing a better job from a gender standpoint than they are from a diversity standpoint. But let me just say right upfront, we're not even close to being there yet. Although strides have been made, we are still a long way from solving these issues. But something that I am really actually wanting to speak more about and do more about is the ageism problem that is facing this industry.

“ Although we are struggling with gender and diversity, I think one of the biggest things that is really affecting this industry is ageism, where you have amazing creatives and people within agencies who are being aged out as they become either too expensive or as they become too senior, because people can hire a younger team or two/three people for what it costs to hire somebody who has been there a long time. ”

I think that is a huge problem that needs to be addressed somehow.

■ **Nurock:** *I am so happy you mentioned that because it is a major issue everywhere in the world and if you look at the agencies that don't have an ageism issue, they still have people who have the experience combined with the youth – those are the agencies that are actually the most successful.*

Swanepoel: Absolutely! And actually, the programme that I am hoping to again do this fall will focus on how to get our 'young guns' if you like, who are under 35, to almost do workshops with the more senior talent because the younger generation bring a different skill set. They are used to throw away content and do more social types of activation, but the senior teams have such good skills. They have got editing and directing skills, art direction that is much more seasoned. But what they can do is impart some of that knowledge to the young folk and the younger folk can impart sort of more of the social, throwaway type of content to the older generation.



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Ann Nurock 8 May 2018



■ **Nurock:** *Definitely! And what are the other major issues, do you think, that are facing the industry right now.*

Swanepoel: I think we as an industry have to focus on getting paid for our creative ideas.

“ One of the biggest things, I think, facing this industry right now is that you get paid for the media but you give the creativity away. ”

I think this is just the most insane thing. I think this is the only industry in the world that gives away all their creative ideas to the CMOs and then the CMOs will decide whether they want to buy it or not.

■ **Nurock:** *I think you have really hit on what, in my opinion, is the biggest issue in the industry right now. Agencies are paid for time but not paid for ideas and something has to give, it has to change. Do you think the CMOs are open to these changes?*

Swanepoel: I think what needs to happen as an industry is we need to rally around and make this change because I know there will always be an agency who will be willing to do it for nothing and that's the problem that we are faced with. There is going to be some person who is going to say I am going to just give it away. But until such time as some of the best agencies and talent stop giving away their ideas and really start charging for them. There are some agencies like [Zulu Alpha Kilo](#) out of Canada, who refuse to pitch; they refuse to not be paid for their ideas. So, you know, there are some people who are making a stance.

But I think what we are also seeing is this trend where 'the Accentures' and other consultancies are buying up creative agencies. Now consultancies will not give creative away and I can only hope in time that what we will see is a bit of a change where consultancies are going to put a price on creativity and they should do because it deserves a premium.

If you have a look at great brands, whether it be 'an Apple' or 'a Mercedes Benz' (trust me, they are really great brands because they've got incredible industrial design), they've got incredible products that have been developed by creative people and there is an intrinsic value to that.

“ What we have to do is charge for our IP and our IP is our creativity. ”

■ **Nurock: Absolutely! Creativity is at the heart of what agencies do and I really hope that something can be done about that. This is always a really fabulous week and thank you once again for hosting me.**

Swanepoel: Thank you and to both Bizcommunity and the Creative Circle. You guys have got an incredible industry down in South Africa. I love it and look forward to seeing you at the boot camp in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

ABOUT ANN NUROCK

Ann is a Partner at Relationship Audits and Management, a global consultancy that measures and optimizes client /agency relationships. Her proprietary Radar tool is used by 30 corporates globally and as a result she interacts with over 80 agencies of all disciplines. Ann spent 25 years plus in the advertising industry as CEO of Grey Advertising South Africa, and head of the Africa region followed by President and CEO of Grey Canada. Contact details: ann.nurock@relationshipaudits.com | Twitter @Annnurock

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