

Advertising awards inspire competition and drive industry excellence, say leading creatives

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The Loeries have once again rewarded the creative inspiration behind the ideas and fresh thinking that drive brand value. In today's fast-paced market, where competition for ideas is fierce, striving to win during awards season is more pronounced - and value-adding - than ever. But it's not just about the peer and client recognition, or the headlines. Market evidence is showing the broader awards eco-system and its culture of always striving for the iconic is driving higher levels of excellence, which is a win for the industry as a whole.

McKinsey research, for instance, analysed 16 years of data from the Cannes Lions Awards and it was a clear victory for the validity of advertising awards. The most creative companies performed better financially and were more innovative than their peers. About 70% of the most creative companies had above-average organic revenue growth and total shareholder returns.

"In these noteworthy times dominated by a global pandemic and massive information flows across various platforms competing for consumers' attention, ads can be no more than interruptions, so creativity is pivotal in making messages stand out," says Keith Manning, executive creative director at TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris Johannesburg. "Inevitably, tough times incite tough attitudes and demands that campaigns are not only creative but add extra value by winning business. Creativity now is tied to extensive testing, refinement, and originality must meet the demands of an increasingly digitally-driven marketplace. It's a testing arena where every hard-won advertising Rand is turned over twice before being spent, and measurability, return on investment (ROI), and growing market share are markers of success."



Keith Manning, executive creative director at TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris Johannesburg

The myth that award-winning creative demands large budgets has also been debunked.

"Large budgets don't govern creativity. What does drive creativity is relationships. Creativity is born and thrives when an agency absorbs a brand's ethos and is immersed in its client's culture, communications, strategies and operational requirements," says Kagiso Tshepe, executive creative director at Grid Worldwide.

Add marketing execs and teams confident enough to let the agency follow their creative instincts and sometimes defy conventional wisdom, and the result is campaigns that soar. The mundane 'me-too' work that often satisfies conservative company leaders is replaced by memorable award-winning messages and content that build brands, drives brand affinity and encourages consumer interaction.

According to Manning and Tshepe, award-winning creativity's most significant skill lies in taking the ordinary and elevating it into an attention-grabbing, compelling creative campaign that fulfils needs.

In the case of MTN, this was brought to life by encouraging community action through the 2021 Y'ello Hope campaign. The objective – supporting government by persuading people to wear masks during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The "WearItForMe" campaign ran simultaneously across several MTN African regions. The base of the campaign was the



Kagiso Tshepe, executive creative director at Grid Worldwide

MTN Group's desire to shift Covid-19 mask-wearing from begrudging compliance to a desirable action. Using guilt had to make way for emotive appeal and compliance," says Manning. "The driving insight was that Africa is a vibrant, multi-generational society. Cultures across the continent emphasise respect, love and care for the elderly, the people who are also most susceptible to the virus."

The multi-generational message behind the campaign was to do something good for others, not just for yourself, evoking personal identity and realising the part every person can play in the lives of those who matter most. The trigger chosen was the world's most influential people – our moms and mother figures. When African mothers speak to their kids, they listen – something that happened when moms through MTN said, 'Wear it for Me'."

At the opposite end of the cultural spectrum, Joburg Ballet faced a reality in which the younger, diverse audience they needed saw ballet as 'old-fashioned' and 'stale'.

"Enter Breaking Ballet, eight bite-size ballet films inspired by the stories that led conversations of the day. We leveraged everything from pop

culture and societal issues to international boxing prize fights to develop the films within days, meaning they were still hugely relevant. ROI measured by free publicity was 560%, with 24 million media impressions recorded. The viewer engagement rate was 91%, way above industry average, and the social following was 31%. Most importantly, ticket sales reached an all-time high, and the audience age dropped to an all-time low. We need to remember that awarded creative ads and campaigns are tangible measurements of achievement for marketing and advertising professionals alike," adds Manning.

Tshepe says marketing executives are demanding more creativity from their agencies and only seeking out those with the drive and reputations to deliver campaigns that lead locally and can compete on the global stage. "Awards are testimony to an agency's ability to build brands. Using awards as indicators of an agency's abilities ensures that the bar is set high and remains so as a partnership between agency and client develops and matures," says Tshepe.

"The Loeries has been awarding excellence for 40 years. TBWA\South Africa's reputation as The Disruption® Company means we always compete for attention. And it pays off. We have won the Creative Circle Overall Rankings Agency and Group of the Year four times in a row, and 103 local and international awards over the past three years that include Nissan Shwii, MTN's Wear it for me and Joburg Ballet's Breaking Ballet. We will always be contenders for honours that place our clients and their brands at the cutting-edge of advertising excellence," concludes Manning.

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