

The reluctant hero

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Peter Mann, chief executive of Meropa Communications received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Prism Awards 2016. The irony of the Award is not lost on him.

“As a company we do not enter awards and this fact is well-known. So much so that when I arrived at the Awards I was asked what I was doing there. I have to admit being humbled and slightly embarrassed.”

As a result of the [company's policy to entering awards](#) it has gained the reputation for being standoffish or for thinking they are better than others. But, Mann says, this is not true. “The truth is that we have been so busy running our business that we have not had the opportunity nor chance.”



This said he does admit that he was taught that it is the clients who must be heroes in public relations (PR) and not the agency and that this attitude it may have irritated many people in the sector as well as Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA). “And I completely understand why,” he says.

So why did he come to the Awards? “We debated this at board level when I was informed I was one of the nominations. We came to the conclusion that this was an Award I was nominated for and so not one that we had entered. Based on this we decided I should attend.”

He adds that he was also very flattered to be nominated and surprised to win. "Given the background I think it is very generous of PRISA that I have been honoured with this award."

An added bonus he says is that he thoroughly enjoyed the Awards. "I was impressed by the quality of the work shown there, the vibrancy of the event and the enthusiasm of the people attending. It was a learning experience for me."

Does this mean we will be seeing Meropa enter the Awards next year? "We are a low key company - on purpose and that I do not think is going to change. For me the real award in PR that you want to win is serving your clients fantastically and I still obsess and worry about client satisfaction," he says.

"However that does not take away from the Awards. The Prism Awards have shown me that they are great for recognising good work and that they have their place. Well done to all the winners."

The other eight nominees included Peter van der Schyff - Pringle Scott Communication, Robyn de Villiers - Burson-Marsteller, Marcus Brewster - marcusbrewster cc, Janine Lloyd - PR Expert, Bridget von Holdt - Glasshouse Communication, Elvis Presslin - Fundi Public Relations & Communications, Barbara Jensen - Gautrain Management Agency and Rene Benecke - University of Johannesburg.

The Award was sponsored by Bizcommunity.com.

The Lifetime Achievement Award judges included Anthea Johnston - Anthea Johnston & Associates, Brendan Seery - marketing and media editor, Independent Newspapers, David Furlonger - Financial Mail and Tony Koenderman - AdReview retired.

The Prism Awards took place on Sunday, 17 April at the Indaba Hotel in Fourways, Gauteng.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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