

East Africa agency named as one of world's best

Tanzanian-based agency, Aggrey & Clifford, has been recognised as one of the world's leading independent agencies in an accolade bestowed by Campaign magazine in London, in association with thenetworkone.



Cobus van Zyl, COO (right) and Rashid Tenga, CEO, of Aggrey & Clifford.

Aggrey & Clifford, an East Africa-based, full-service advertising agency founded in Tanzania in 2009, features in the just published [‘The World’s Leading Independent Agencies 2017’](#), in *Campaign*. The agency employs 70 full-time staff, a 100-man mobile salesforce and an additional network of 500-plus part-time brand promoters across Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda.

“The World’s Leading Independent Agencies” is published annually and is not a ranking by size or success in awards festivals, but a series of inspirational articles written by 12 agencies from around the world, judged by the editorial board to be creative and thought leaders in the marketing communications industry.

Cobus van Zyl, chief operations officer at Aggrey & Clifford, attributes the agency’s success to its understanding that each market is unique and complicated in its nuances. “One of the greatest mistakes brands make, is not recognising how unique each African market is, and how each region has totally different needs and ideas. Africa is made up of 54 nations, each with diverse tribes, and languages, as well as cultures and ideologies. They are simply not as homogenous as most Western nations.”

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According to him, there are too many brands currently, who think they can merely adapt or localise a global campaign to suit the African market. “That doesn’t work. The assumption that the simple human truth, that underpins work, will resonate universally is inaccurate. A campaign idea often gets completely different responses in different countries, and even in various regions in the same country.”

He says it is important to understand the differences in the regions and customise solutions to each region.

“Each environment is completely different to the next, and will impact on an advertising campaign in various and

diverse ways. Take for example product distribution, which can be affected by issues as simple as the lack of reliable infrastructure, or unreliable broadband which impacts on any electronic communications. These issues need to be managed, and strategies developed that meet these challenges, and adapt to the various conditions and circumstances found on the continent.”

He adds that Aggrey & Clifford has also introduced a mobile sales solution to meet the needs of African markets. “We have introduced approximately 100 individuals on motorbikes that drive around, on a daily basis, selling cigarettes countrywide. Their customers are small retail outlets such as spaza shops and other informal trade. Essentially, this mobile force meets the last mile requirement, by taking the product from the depot to these informal sellers. Aggrey & Clifford came up with this sales solution, thereby removing the need for businesses to hire staff and buy the equipment needed for this process.”

Local insights

In addition, Van Zyl says the company developed an application that tracks the distribution and geomaps the entire project in real time. “The app tracks where the drivers go, the quantities they sell and deliver, etc. Moreover, it also allows them to upload photos to share with the clients.”

He says, in East Africa, Aggrey & Clifford has had great success for the brands it represents by investing in two things. “We devote significant time to unearthing local insights. This is not as simple as it sounds, in fact it can be deceptively complex when factoring in local customs, religious beliefs, political influence, significance of symbols and suchlike into the equation. All these issues are highly nuanced and complicated. Next, we believe in pushing innovative ideas and leading-edge technology that will deliver the message, irrespective of how unconventional it may be.”

According to Van Zyl, in order to do this effectively, paradigms need to be shifted. “Start with a clean slate when trying to get a handle on who your consumer is. Bear in mind that one country does not equal a single message. Instead, look at markets, regions, provinces, tribes, rather than countries. The deeper a brand is willing to drill down to thoroughly understand each of these, and their uniqueness, the more success it will have.”

Trends

Focussing on global trends does not guarantee success either. “Trends cannot simply be copied and applied to Africa. The continent, although sometimes behind world trends, is sometimes ahead too. How far will vary from country to country. Instead, take the approach of helping the local marketing team to understand the strategy, meaning, and ethos of the brand. Then give them freedom to tell the story in their own way, a way that will speak to the people of that region.”

The world is looking to emerging markets for growth, and international brands have an opportunity to be pioneers in understanding the unique landscape, and promoting their products and services to over 1.2 billion consumers.

“Africa’s growth is being bolstered by factors including the fastest urbanisation rate in the world and, according to McKinsey, a larger working-age population than either China or India by 2034,” he explains.

Brands that focus on the region, and make the investment now, are the ones who will enjoy solid, long-term gains in Africa. “However, brands who think they can treat the continent as a single market, will quickly lose their way.”

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