

Surprise! THIS is today's African consumer

 By Leigh Andrews

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Read up on key insights from the first sessions of Business of Design - Mduzuzi Simelane talks about how to enhance the continent's filmmakers, while trend analyst, Nicola Cooper shares a snapshot of today's African consumer. It's probably not who your brand is targeting.

Business of Design took place at Red & Yellow in Salt River for the first time, with the majority of attendees alumni having attended previous sessions at a now-too-small venue. Business of Design head of programme Tracy Lynn Chemaly spoke of her own experience at a recent conference, acknowledging that it's difficult to switch off but essential to do so to fully appreciate what's being shared with you. She encouraged attendees to switch off and soak up the knowledge.



Simelane and Cooper.

Chemaly then introduced Trevyn McGowan, cofounder of Business of Design and The Guild Group. In her welcome, she said it's interesting to reflect on what's happened since the last Business of Design in August last year. McGowan shared that she's noticed a **renewed clarity of thought** now, typified by two recent experiences: First was, the opening of the Zeitz Mocaa, and how she was struck by how calm, clear, authentic and visionary masterminds David Green and Thomas Heatherwick were. She was inspired by the approach of trained makers and thinkers on the creative process of a city and continent in the way they think of space, their generosity of spirit and genuine niceness, as well as the authenticity of it, especially in how that contrasted to another experience she had overseas. She said the current design thinking is about **striving beyond the ordinary**.



Invoking debate - Q&A with Zeitz MOCAA curator Mark Coetzee

Ruth Cooper 4 Oct 2017



The Business of Design team has been through fire and brimstone and the most difficult period of their personal lives, taking stock of the fact that in order to grow, you need to look at corporate structures, job descriptions and targets. "Some we do need in creative or design businesses, some we don't," said McGowan, but it's a noisy world out there, and for people to take note of what we do, we need to be different.

Mduduzi Simelane, cofounder of BlackNation Media and born in just 1988, spoke on 'being different', as the first speaker of the day. His topic was the future of content creation and collaboration in the SADC region.



Business of Design speaker Q&A: Mduduzi Simelane

Jessica Tennant 4 Oct 2017



Simelane believes in what Steve Jobs stood for, aiming to make content look sexy and attractive to their target audience. He shared experiences in putting the BlackNation Media business together and pointed out that by 2040, Africa will have the **largest youth culture**, so that's BlackNation Media's focus. While West, East and North Africa are active in this regard, he says now is the SADC's turn to shine in the content development space.

Tadow = Tada + Wow

Following extensive travels across the region this year, Simelane has picked up that there's enormous appetite but a huge lack of initiatives allowing content creators, to **disrupt the space** with authentic stories and distribution platforms. That's why they're aiming to create an industry of young, mostly black filmmakers. Within the SA student film market in particular, investors don't see the space as a business opportunity. Simelane said the entire sector needs to work together and shape the industry, harnessing the potential out there and monetising it.

If we get that right, 'Tadow' is what comes to mind, taken from two phrases creatives and designer know well – 'tada' and 'wow'. To improve the local film industry, Simelane says we need to support the level and brands need to get involved in reaching the student market through sponsorship of content initiatives at this level – creativity is one way to decrease the country's unemployment levels, so it's a win-win.

Nicola Cooper, trend researcher, analyst and cultural strategist at Nicola Cooper and Associates spoke of trends currently shaking businesses.



Business of Design speaker Q&A: Nicola Cooper

Jessica Tennant 3 Oct 2017



Cooper began by stating that she's usually hidden in a boardroom so came armed with information and ways of thinking to help attendees in their business. She acknowledged the word 'trend' is overused, yet an important factor in making decisions and implementing strategy.

The moment is consumerism

Cooper spoke of issues of trust based on the Trump administration and Brexit, trickling down into general distrust of what business is selling, we trust 'people like us' more than we do corporations, so brands need to put more effort into **understanding our consumers** than ever before. Explaining the current moment of consumerism, Cooper said driving a point of differentiation for local retailers is that we can't just copy paste Western notions. This ties into the concept of 'glocalisation', particularly in terms of how global trends have local influence and how local goods are sold to global customers.

“ We need to make more of an effort to reach the consumers affected by brand boredom or else they'll remain disengaged with our brands. The answer is to speak to people in a unique, authentic manner. ”

Cooper added that in light of the current Western political shocks Africa actually offers an ideal of political peace, with the **rising black middle-class** having increased by 60% in the last decade. Often companies worry about the white middle-class but need to be disrupted with this reality. In addition, by 2050, half the continent's population will be under 24 years old, the biggest youth bulge in the world, with mobile access and a beautiful new way of thinking. *That's who your brand should be speaking to.*

It's a perception shift for the legacy brands of corporate South Africa over where we're going and how businesses will really work. So it's beyond looking overseas. Instead, Africans are determining what we deem and claim as African and this is a necessary differentiation tool. Services need to speak to our local complexities and solve African problems on the ground, as the future is here. The Russel Hobbs Art of Living campaign is a good example of this ' #AfricalsWhereItIsAt cultural shift:

There's less focus on money for what Cooper refers to as 'these **five-screen kids**' who have been brought up online, and they're more liberal and creative lifestyles than seen before. They're engaged, doing rather than documenting and want to participate as active activists – let them.

Building on the essence of Simelane's presentation, Cooper concluded that the **new consumers no longer want a seat at your own table, they're building their own.**

That's just an initial taste of the current flavour of design-thinking. [Click here](#) for our Business of Design coverage, and be sure to follow [@busofdesign](#) for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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