

Africa: We've talked the talk, now let's walk the walk

 By [Dawn Rowlands](#)

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As all the hype of [Cannes Lions](#) 2013 fades into the distance we need to take a closer look at why these creative media festivals are relevant and what impact they should have on the African media and marketing landscape. (video)

Having spent time at Cannes Lions this year as a judge in the Media category I am now even more determined to ensure that brands and agencies do their best work in Africa. Personally, I feel that sharing insights with a broader marketing audience and our business competitors can only benefit all in this fast growing African media landscape.

Judgment is costly - so get it right!

Let's start with the judging process and the caliber of work. There are literally thousands of entries into each award category and entry is by no means a cheap affair, so best you make sure that what you are entering actually meets the criteria. You have three minutes to present your work visually (a video clip) so be very clear on what your strategy is: the concept; how it's executed; and most importantly what the results were.

Submitting an entry that has had no results will get your entry thrown out immediately. Before you enter, go onto the [Cannes Lions website](#) and take a look at previous entries - this will give you a very clear idea of how to present your entry.

Why the validation?

I was surprised to see very little work from South Africa being submitted and even less from other African countries. When you look globally, other emerging markets were highly represented with incredible creative work - Brazil and India to name just two. Despite my disappointment, I do strongly encourage African agencies to submit their work in future.

The reason for these types of awards is twofold: firstly your work competes on a global scale, and secondly, and more importantly, "clients" get to see what good work really looks like. What better way to keep the industry and its innovators top of mind than being showcased at global awards like Cannes. In this way clients can push agencies and vice versa in terms of creating insightful campaigns that work for the brand as opposed to just creating work that looks good but does not meet the business objectives of the client.

Despite only a handful of entries from our continent, I am incredibly optimistic about the future of creative work from this region. One of the presentations that I attended was by Diageo Africa (Africa represents Diageo's largest group of emerging markets in terms of net sales and employs over 5,300 people - 1 in 4 of Diageo's total workforce worldwide are in its businesses in Africa and many more indirectly through the production, distribution and promotion of its brands) and

from its perspective (and mine) Africa has far less restrictions from a distribution and logistics perspective, thus allowing agencies and brands together to be more creative and achieve their business objectives on the continent.

Africa is the playing field for creative excellence

The light at the end of the tunnel for me about Africa is a rather simplistic one. To date global brands have not invested in marketing in Africa so you start on a clean slate and can be bold and daring and the cost is less prohibitive than most other markets globally. Go on... Do your best work in Africa.

What did stand out for me about the various - yet very few "African market presentations" - was the lack of real information and insight as to what can really be done in Africa. We are surely past the stage when companies are still paying lip service to the market.

One presentation that, according to me, ticked all the boxes was a joint presentation by MIT & Aegis Media (yes, you may say I am being biased as I am part of the company and I accept that criticism, but the proof is there for all to see). They truly are investing in the African market and where tech will have the biggest impact on how communications will change consumer behavior.

Their joint presentation, 'The Future of the Human: Brand: Interface', takes you on a journey ten years after Steven Spielberg's 2002 science fiction film 'Minority Report' which introduced a series of technologies expected to pervade society in 2054. The predictions are already a reality: from multi-touch interfaces and gesture technology; to vending machines using facial recognition to deliver demographically targeted ads.

John Underkoffler, an original member of the team assembled to predict Minority Report's future technologies; Hiroshi Ishii, a Professor of Media Arts and Sciences at the MIT Media Lab; and Aegis Media's CEO of North America & EMEA, Nigel Morris, discussed the vision behind the predictions, where technology is taking us and the future potential of these developments for consumers and brands in a converged world.

We still hear so many people talking about integration and great content, but show me the work and let me see this in action (a good example for me of real integration in Africa was the recent launch by Bailey's for its new bottle into the West Africa region - over 10 agencies, incredible logistics, but results for the brand were achieved and surpassed all expectations).

I also felt that global media players such as LinkedIn and Twitter provided some interesting insights into what they had done and their commendable success stories, but I would have really loved to hear what they plan on doing in Africa going forward.

We've talked the talk... let's walk the walk

Where to from here? Agencies like ourselves need to work with clients and help them be brave and try new things. We keep saying integrate (but having a few elements of social media in a campaign is not integration) and yes CEOs like myself have to keep learning/sharing and encouraging both staff and clients to use the new world of media technology to achieve business goals.

We all know that the African continent is mobile-ready and we need to create incredible content that we are able to share with consumers in order to grow in Africa.

So let's start implementing all the great ideas we have been talking about for so long. I welcome conversations with any brand or agency in the region and encourage all to share insights relevant to the new media and marketing landscape - the more we share the faster the industry grows for all of us.

ABOUT DAWN ROWLANDS

Dawn Rowlands is the CEO of Dentsu Aegis Network SSA. She has over 20 years of experience in the media industry and has most notably been a shareholder/founding partner of Nota Bene, a strategy agency in South Africa, and is also the founder of Posterscope SA. Contact Dawn on dawn.rowlands@aemedia.com.

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