

A tribute to advertising and the art of happiness

By [Grant Sithole](#)

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Deep in the heart of Brixton (not the one in London), the one between Mayfair and Melville (you know the one, mos), nestled above a Pick n Pay, there was once an outbound call centre that sold people dreams of holidays and time share to those who dreamed of finally taking that holiday.



Image supplied. Grant Sithole, chief product officer Publicis Groupe, pays a tribute to advertising and the art of happiness

I know this because I once answered an ad that led me to do a grand total of one day's work at this call centre of excellence. I mean, even the word 'centre' is used pretty loosely here.

It was four, long, Masonite walls, landline phones, matric dance shirts, a little too much makeup and a script you dare not deviate from. It was also 2001, so please forgive this old man a bit of reminiscence!

I learned a lot of things in those four hours, but chief among the many lessons, which I still carry with me today, was that if you are not smiling on this side of the phone, then you are not smiling on the other side of the phone.

How else would we pry pension monies from the hands of unsuspecting house tannies?

A smile on one end creates a smile on the other

So can you imagine the sheer glee when, years later, I was an advertising mapimpane sitting at Sonovision in a *True Love* radio recording with *the* Brett Morris and heard the words 'Okay that was a good read. Now can we get one with a bit more of a smile?' I mean. Come on! Kak Arno's was right!

A smile on one end creates a smile on the other.

This became my core mantra as I climbed up the persuasive steps of the advertising hierarchy. I believe people can tell when you've had fun creating a piece of advertising. We can tell from the execution that there are happy people behind these TV ads and consumers can too.

Granted, happy is relative and manifests itself in many forms, but trust me, that envy you feel when you see a piece where everything feels considered and crafted, comes from knowing that somewhere in some studio there where some happy creatives indulging in their craft.

Pockets of happiness

I'm not implying that happiness doesn't involve rigorous debate and thoughts of 'but how many times must I present the same thing? On the contrary, these are the very fibres that build this happiness.

The clear briefs let us know exactly which business problem we are solving for our clients - happiness.

Traffic/ops teams whose expertise steps in to recommend the right amount of time to get the best version of creatives - bliss.

The strat teams who know how to get the right juice out of briefs that at first seemed like they were 'in and out' - pure joy!

The clients who want their work to stand out for all the right reasons? Beautiful waterfalls of joy flooding my soul with happiness!

We have all been in so many meetings and catch-ups where we have been trying to shake off the very real shock of the past two or so years. And no one can rush the healing process we all obviously have to go through. However, I do also know how much we all still lean on the pockets of happiness on this journey as part of our recovery.





Embrace and fight for the happiness

We are in the creative industry. We are in an industry that has the power to deliver these pockets of happiness to millions of people every, damn, day. Yet, we struggle with happiness internally we are going to become part of the gloom. And ‘*Akho need*’ as my Xhosa friends sometimes remind me.

There is no need to be the person in the way of the happiness. You really don’t want to be that person. There is no need to deprive us of the likes of the KFC ad with the food inspector, Chicken Licken’s Big John, Nandos’ Mars ad (I see you, chicken people!).

These creatives and agencies really are responsible for a lot of the happiness quotient. The makers of the Pineapple and Naked outdoor work, the people behind the controversial Mac G podcast, *Tali* (yes, I’m on season 3), Noko Mashaba, Nkululeko my brada, Drip, Kabza da Small...(also, this is where you add your faves, *akere?*)

So, going into another year, I want to thank the ad people and creators of every kind who still embrace and fight for the happiness to make the work that makes our people, dream, laugh, stand up, get riled up, get emotional and change the course of a nation (probably). You know who you are and we appreciate you.

You must know that your fun really is our fun and *siyabulela*. It has become increasingly harder to get to that work so I tip my occasional spottie to you all.

Trust me, we can all feel that you are smiling on the other side of the phone. Nothing wrong.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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