

Take a shot and keep up, or die

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Its goal to become the best advertising and communications agency in Africa in the next five years may sound crazy, but considering the last five years, Nic Simmonds, Clockwork Media's executive director, believes they have a shot.



Nic Simmonds

And if you look at how the agency ended 2017, you will believe him. The agency ended 2017 the same way they started it, with a top award. In November they walked away with Financial Mail AdFocus Awards' Public Relations Agency of the Year. Earlier in the year, it was awarded African Excellence Awards Agency of the Year after winning a total of seven awards. They also took home 13 awards at the annual Prism Awards – making them the most awarded agency of the event – and a Silver for Large Agency of the Year. It's no wonder The Holmes Report named them Africa's 7th fastest growing agency globally.



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While their approach has been a pretty aggressive one, it's helped them become a respected force in their industry, says Simmonds. Market research suggests that they are perceived as hungry, lean, smart and dynamic, but he thinks that has resonated with a lot of decision makers looking for something new and fresh.

"We strive to be disruptive and smart, and are taking on some of the largest, oldest and most established marketing and advertising companies in the world. We're independent, we go hard, and we have fun doing it."

He describes the agency as “a bootstrapped, privately-owned business that has never taken on any third-party investment or debt”.



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The agency has managed to grow by over 100% per year for five years running, he adds. “While we have reached a lot of our goals in terms of scale and breadth of service, 2018 is all about reinforcing our position and moving towards horizon two.”

Part of this is to continue with their policy to hire hungry and ambitious people to work for them, and then push them hard to be the best they can be for themselves, for their clients and for Clockwork. “At the same time, we do our best to remove obstacles in their way, and support them on that journey. With our clients, we create a high bar at the outset and then do everything in our power to clear it every time.”

While he admits that they are a young business and still need to solve some identity issues, he says they have a clear idea of where they want to get to in the next six months. “We applied an almost irrationally optimistic approach to setting up this business, so now that we are established, it only makes sense that we view the way forward through the same lens. We want to push the standard of work we are doing to its absolute limits, across the board.”



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Correlating to this is the trend – that is not new, but still there and not going anywhere – that marketing more than ever before is expected to show a direct correlation between money spent and sales achieved. “I think the big creative houses are less vulnerable to this demand as larger brands are happy to commit significant money just to maintain a presence in their market.”

He adds that going forward, the transformation requirement is becoming more important, particularly for the biggest advertising spenders. “As larger and capable agencies make progress here, big brands have more to choose from when selecting partners that are telling a good transformation story, and this is putting pressure on everyone in our industry to keep up or die.”

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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