

How to leapfrog your industry's disruption and future-proof Africa

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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Mann Made recently disrupted themselves before anyone else could with a rebrand that highlights their adoption of an exponential mindset, aimed at solving South Africa and the continent's grand challenges. Here's how what started out as a wedding video company by three brothers in 2000 has transformed into a storytelling, forward-thinking, 65-employee strong experiential brand agency that hosts the Singularity University South Africa Summit...



The Mann brothers - Mc, Shayne and Kevin.

The SingularityU SA Summit, taking place at the Kyalami International Convention Centre on 15 and 16 October this year is no everyday conference.

Instead, it aims future-proofing Africa, by embracing exponential technologies that will help to create economic, political and environmental sustainability in the future.

That ties in perfectly with Mann Made's refreshed standing as a brand experience company with the same aspirations.

More than just a cutting-edge new logo and name, this rebrand goes beyond the surface to how they think and do. Their massive transformative purpose or MTP, for example, speaks of the company's commitment to creating a global community of change-makers that bravely benefit all:

Here, Mic Mann explains the brothers' almost two-decades-long business journey so far, and just how they plan to help co-create that revolutionary future for the continent.

🍷 ***Talk us through the context and process of rebranding to just 'Mann Made'.***

It's the season of rebrands, just look at Cell C and Absa – we actually played an integral role in the Absa rebrand, as they are one of our long-standing clients.



Mc Mann.

We've come a long way from those humble beginnings back in 2000 when we started out shooting wedding videos to becoming a family of innovative storytellers, each of whom is passionate about telling our clients' brand stories through a variety of media.

We're mavericks and always try to push boundaries, which is why in 2007 we branched out into live eventing, followed by brand activations as well as interactive web design and app development. Today, our portfolio of products and services also includes animation, virtual and augmented reality services, as well as social media campaigns.

So in 19 years, we've grown our business to 65 employees, as well as over 150 freelancers, across four connected

buildings in the Mann Made complex in Kramerville, Sandton. Mann Made has evolved into a brand experience company, which has worked with multinational companies, Fortune 500 businesses and has executed global events.

Our real breakthrough came in 2015 when we produced two custom events for Singularity University. These changed the way we think about our business and the future.



Mann Made embraces exponential change

Mann Made 9 Apr 2018



We immersed ourselves in the world of exponential technologies, bought 3D printers, invested in robots, augmented reality and artificial intelligence. We've realigned our business mindsets and have restructured our focus to create a regional and global community of changemakers.

The future of work is something that comes up regularly in the Singularity University programme and it seemed fitting that we needed to change with the times and growing trends.

That's why we rebranded – not just our name and logo, but the essence of how we think, what we do, and who we are. Our service offerings have leapfrogged beyond media production, which is why we have dropped 'media' from our name.

Our rebrand to Mann Made represents our new role in consulting to African businesses on how they too can leapfrog into the future by embracing exponential technologies and grow their profit margins 10x rather than 10%.

■ **Yes, you now have robots, 3D printers and VR consoles at your Sandton offices. What does that add to the company culture and average 'day of work'?**

When we're travelling we join weekly meetings through the Beam robot, which can turn and interact with others in the room. This and other various augmented and virtual reality elements are an integral part of our SingularityU South Africa Summit, as well as our custom programmes – that's just how we roll.

Our reception has a VR set up, which our clients can test out while they wait for a meeting. Our Mann Made family can develop their skills sets on the latest technologies and software, which means they're always keeping pace with the newest technological developments.



#BehindtheSelfie with... Shayne Mann

Leigh Andrews 26 Jul 2017



For example, when my brother Shayne couldn't find the correct housing for his GoPro in Johannesburg, instead of ordering it from overseas and waiting for it to be delivered, Ronnie Ho-Hip, head of animation at Mann Made, offered to 3D-print the solution in a matter of 30 minutes.

And we could augment it to include additional features, too.

We can also quickly 3D-print prototypes, just how we want them, with numerous iterations, which means we don't have to outsource the work. This drastically cuts down the waiting time and means we have the opportunity to revise the prototype until we have the best version possible.



How business can benefit from great storytelling

Shayne Mann, Mann Made 18 Sep 2012



We like doing things differently and trying new things, which is why we're launching the first virtual reality press conference on the continent at our SingularityU Insider's Insights launch in September.

■ **Amazing. So you effectively disrupted yourselves before anyone else could with the rebrand, and by thinking exponentially rather than linearly. Share a few tips for marketers to keep ahead of the pack over the coming months – without giving away your trade secrets, of course!**

Embrace exponential technologies in your everyday work and life – it's as simple as that! Try to imagine how your industry may be disrupted by exponential technologies and try to leapfrog it by developing new iterations of your business, sometimes it's a case of redefining your business model.

“ Singularity University co-founder Peter Diamandis famously said that the day before you have an incredible breakthrough, the idea seems terrible. ”

Keep that in mind, invest in research and development and know that not every attempt will lead to success, but it will help you refine your final service or product.

■ **You've also shifted focus beyond SA – how will the new London Mann Made X offering enhance what you're doing on the continent?**

We're hoping that London Mann Made X, which launches in mid-2019, will spearhead growth and investment opportunities for various startups across Africa that emulate the Singularity University mindset of creating abundance and positive change.

We hope it will be a platform to showcase the innovative things Africans are doing and how they are leapfrogging, sometimes due to the very nature of the environment and the lack of certain infrastructure – instead of being seen as a challenge, it's an opportunity.

■ **That's for sure. Sounds like the future is bright! Let's take a step back now and reflect on a few of the highlights and challenges you've faced over the years as Mann Made.**

Starting with the positives, at Mann Made, we've had the honour of working with some of South Africa's – and the world's – largest multinationals and organisations, from Standard Bank and AbInBev to Samsung, MTN and Fiverr. Development Bank and the Human Rights Foundation are also among our clients.

For example, in March we hosted the inaugural Oslo Freedom Forum, in conjunction with the Human Rights Foundation and The Nelson Mandela Foundation.



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It saw 10 human rights activists from around the world talking about women's, LGBTQI+, religious and political human rights, and we drew a crowd of policy makers, local activists, journalists, non-profits and active citizenry.

Johannesburg mayor, Herman Mashaba, was our honorary guest speaker at the closing gala dinner. We understand the necessity for such an event and have already committed to hosting #OFFinJoburg in 2019 and 2020.



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Another highlight was completing the Singularity University Executive Programme in the United States, which means we're the official hosts of the SingularityU South Africa Summit – currently the only one of its kind on the continent.

It's about embracing exponential technologies to help solve some of Africa's grand challenges. The inaugural summit secured funding for a number of startups, sponsored numerous students, and cemented new business deals for positive social change.

While there have also been numerous challenges along the way, we have used them to reassess our playing field, tweak the rules of the game and use the learnings to transform our future output. We were involved with an ill-timed record label that was disrupted by the likes of iTunes and Napster, as well as advert games, built around the brand - these both proved that timing is everything.

“ In another example, back in 2005, we created a social media platform called Wapbits. The idea was for it to be the YouTube of mobile phones, especially as there are so many on the continent. While it had an immense possibility, it was too ahead of its time, due to the high cost of data in South Africa and poor internet penetration. We learned the importance of knowing the market and your clientele – business is not about a copy-and-paste mentality, it's about context and solving needs. ”

Africa has the largest population of youth of any other continent, and this trend will continue well into the future. **Such a far-reaching insight. Lastly, why is it especially important to future-proof Africa?**

Essentially, this means that Africa is the future.



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Leigh Andrews 26 Feb 2018



It's also home. Many people still have the perception that Africa is behind in terms of various developments, but we hold the belief that the opposite is true, it offers the chance to be creative and innovative and try something new – to carve your way into the future.

There's no better time to start future-proofing your business. Click through to the [Mann Made press office](#) for more, and be sure to follow the team on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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