Africa is a market of opportunity for PR

By Danette Breitenbach

30 Oct 2018

Scott Wilson, president Africa and Europe, Burson Cohn & Wolfe, was in South Africa for the first time, last week, following the Burson-Marsteller (BM) and Cohn Wolfe (CW) merger in February this year.



©Bakhtiar Zein via 123RF

The reality is that many of the European markets are mature and although the agency is winning in these and even declining markets, it's a tough battlefield.

"So increasingly our clients and therefore ourselves are looking for markets of opportunity. We are seeing more leads for new clients in this region from Asia, in particular China, whereas 10 years ago they were from clients from the United States," he explains.

> *Thank-you all for some wonderful African hospitality. A fantastic week to be in SA too https://t.co/tMQH7P46c6— scott wilson (@scottbwilson) October 25, 2018*

Wilson continues, saying that year ago it was not unusual for every client outside Europe and Africa to want the top five markets. "I think that is disappearing very quickly. We are getting a real smorgasbord approach now from clients who will

ask for Turkey, Russia, South Africa, The Netherlands and the UK. While this is a strange mix, it reflects where clients see commercial opportunity."

"We know from just the macroeconomics that Africa is a great opportunity market," he adds. "While as a proportion of our global revenue at the moment, Africa is small, it does not matter because it is growing, which is better than a flat market that is going nowhere."

BM and CW were both international network agencies within WPP. In that sense they have been friends for a long time, explains Wilson. "We have partnered together and also pitched against each other as big network agencies do over a long time and the merger is like a marriage that is formalising what was a long engagement."

Synergies

When you look at it on a macro level the potential synergies are quite exciting. "BM one of the original pioneers of our industry and it has always been the go-to business for everything from corporate communications, reputation management, crisis communications, and public affairs, etc. That was the heartland of legacy BM," he says.

"CW comes from a very different background. It was far more recognised as one of the first digital innovators within our industry and highly creative, focused on brand marketing and healthcare," he says.

The appeal is in the scale that the merged company offers clients. "This allows us to ultimately meet all their needs at a level where previously we would have had to refer that client to another agency. This is the opportunity of BCW."

If BCW Europe and Africa were a stand-alone public relations agency, then it would be in the top 20 global business in its own right so huge is this scale, and with this comes huge opportunity, he adds.

Burson Cohn & Wolfe unveils rebrand
10 Oct 2018

The ambition for BCW is to be a genuinely integrated communications company. Wilson says they are not there yet. Despite their scale, he says not every market in the region is able to offer all the fully integrated services of an agency. "This is our challenge: how do we move forward? It is your classic changing engines mid-flight scenario because we must continue to serve the needs of our clients while at the same time we must continue to invest in new talent and upscale our existing talent. The pressure is always time."

As such, the focus is on training and upskilling. This week 20 African branded partners came together in South Africa and learnt two new BCW methodologies.

"I think it is true to say, in terms of our major competitors, and that's the beauty of being here this week with Robyn (De Villiers) and her team and the branded partners, that this gives us a commercial differentiation. While scale is important to many of our global clients, with scale there must be consistency and quality of offering and that's the value of training," he adds.

Robyn de Villiers, chairman and CEO: Africa at BCW, says training and upskilling is what they have been doing for 20 years. "We have helped clients with our learnings from 25 years of working in Africa. We always said we sell a continent-wide strategic approach that our people can deliver on a local level. The local insight that we offer is the most valuable to a client because we have our branded partners in the countries.

"Clients are asking for Africa and if you do not have a partner on the continent you have to scramble around, whereas we

have the whole of Africa so even if the business is not as enormous in Africa, it is still a key thing that you have it so you can participate easily in the global pitches," she adds.

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.

- 7 South African PR agencies on Provoke Media 2024 EMEA campaign shortlist - 27 Mar 2024
- DStv *Chasing the Sun 2* spoof campaign, #SACIVAD, that urges men to be "stronger teargether" goes viral - 25 Mar 2024
- Roanna Williams reflects on her term as the first female Creative Circle chairperson - 14 Mar 2024
- #WomensDay: A cyclical change to the glass ceiling - 8 Mar 2024
- #WomensDay: Opening the glass door, embracing the sisterhood - 8 Mar 2024

View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com