

Ogilvy prospers as it 'liberates' brands

In the past five years Ogilvy has managed to produce two-digit profit figures and garner itself a steady stream of awards despite an economic downturn that has left its mark on other marketing and advertising agencies.

Ogilvy Johannesburg MD Julian Ribeiro says the agency's clients have in fact increased spending and the company has taken on a number of new clients this year, including Cell C, South African Airways, Fifa, Castle Lager, PPC and Coca-Cola's Brrr range of advertising. Other clients include Dove soap, the African National Congress election campaign, BP, Cadbury, Dulux, Sun International, MultiChoice, KFC, Nestle and South African Breweries.

In the past three years, Ogilvy has experienced impressive growth: its income grew 19% from July last year to June this year, more than 25% in 2007 to last year, and 18% in 2006-07. The new accounts are estimated to be worth at least R400m in billings locally, although Coca Cola's total campaign, if included, would push up this figure substantially.

A largely black creative team from Ogilvy Johannesburg took the ultimate prize, Loerie's Grand Prix, this year for their Young, Gifted and Black campaign in the experiential mixed media category.

The recognition is a feather in the cap of the company in an industry that is criticised for its lack of senior black creatives.

"The spread of our clients is one of the things that ensured Ogilvy did not feel the recession as much," says Ribeiro. "I think the advertising agencies that were hardest hit by the recession were those dependent on cellphones and motor vehicles."

Neo Makhele, Ogilvy Johannesburg strategic planning director, says a lot of emphasis was placed on explaining to clients exactly how their money was being spent and what value they were getting. "We collated research on what consumers are doing and how they are buying during the recession. The brand must still be paramount, but deal with value which mitigates churn," Makhele says.

Fran Luckin, Ogilvy executive creative director, says it also helped that many of their clients were involved in the World Cup, which meant there was no real slowdown in spending.

Asked what she believed the challenge in the future would be for the agency, she says: "It would be interesting to see what happens after 2010 — if there is a dip in spending."

This year Ogilvy won Leading Agency for Apex Awards, taking three out of 10 golds and six of the 10 awards; Leading Agency, Loeries; Leading Agency, Eagles; Ogilvy Johannesburg voted leading agency, Cannes; Gauteng Agency of the Year, Big Idea of the Year and Radio Campaign of the year, Finweek AdReview Awards; Effective Advertising Campaign, KFC Shake it Up, Advertising Agency of the Year; and African Agency Network of the Year, *Financial Mail* AdFocus Awards.

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