

## Advertising not paw-sing for breath

Advertising agency MetropolitanRepublic may talk about creative excellence and client relationships being central to its success - but a dose of superstition doesn't do any harm either.

By [David Furlonger](#) 1 Apr 2011

In the foyer of the agency's new Bryanston building is a clowder\* of ceramic cats, their battery-operated rigid paws waving remorselessly. MD Dawn Klatzko says at an overseas advertising festival a couple of years ago, agency staff temporarily "liberated" similar cats from their display case and took them to the awards ceremony. After MetropolitanRepublic was named among the winners, the cats were declared lucky so some more now live at the agency's offices.

Whether or not you believe in such things, the cats certainly haven't done MetropolitanRepublic any harm. The four-year-old agency has enjoyed phenomenal growth. Now it is taking its first steps further into Africa. This week it opens a subsidiary in Uganda. Other countries in its sights include Rwanda, Zambia and Kenya. There are also opportunities in Botswana and Swaziland.

Last year was extraordinary for MetropolitanRepublic. As agency for two FIFA World Cup sponsors - First National Bank and mobile communications group MTN - its work enjoyed the international visibility that comes along once in a generation. The "Ayoba" advertising slogan for MTN became an SA byword.

There was the danger that once the event was over, there would be a letdown. Klatzko says: "It was a worry but we have been so busy we haven't had time to indulge in 'what next?'" New accounts, including Castle Milk Stout and M-Net's Vuzu channel, are part of the reason. And, of course, the new African business.

The MTN association is opening doors there. MetropolitanRepublic had to pitch for the group's Ugandan business but Klatzko admits: "We had an advantage because of our success for MTN in SA." Other clients will follow.

The African foray has come sooner than planned, but the opportunity to follow MTN was irresistible. Many SA agency groups in other African countries subcontract to independent agencies there. Klatzko says: "It's mostly licensing agreements. There's not always enough training or skills transfer."

Nor is enough done to transfer the spirit and ethos of SA agencies. Klatzko says the MetropolitanRepublic model is a "hatchery". It will establish its own subsidiary agencies and train staff in SA. This is despite WP the multinational communications group that owns 27% of MetropolitanRepublic, offering use of its existing African network. "We didn't want to follow someone else's model and have their vision imposed on us."

Since its 2007 launch, the agency has consistently been ranked in the top tier of SA creative advertising. Its client list includes Tiger Brands, Anglo Platinum and Wimpy. A number of Wimpy commercials have been ranked among SA consumers' best-liked ads, ranked annually by market researcher Millward Brown.

MetropolitanRepublic has enjoyed a reputation as something of a maverick in its approach to business and advertising solutions. That word can still be applied to co-founder, chief creative planner and leather-jacketed biker Paul Warner, but the agency itself is bordering on respectability. "We probably ran a little ahead of ourselves at first but now we have spent time creating structure and processes," says Klatzko.

"We've been clarifying our vision, looking at what works and how to protect it."

One thing to protect is the financial model. It cost R6m to design and furnish the interior of the new offices money that came from cash flow. "The past two years have been very profitable. I think the owners and shareholders are surprised how good [their profits] have been."

So where does Klatzko think this "maverick" is in its development? "We are like a bright 18-year-old. We s have the same energy and drive but we also have the wisdom to understand how things work and to listen advice."

*\*The collective name for a group of cats*

*Source: Financial Mail*

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