

# Rise of the independents

By  Danette Breitenbach

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This year's Prism Awards' most successful winners are all independent agencies - from Clockwork Media with 12 awards, PR Worx with 11, Atmosphere with 10 and Engage Joe Public with 5. The top award of the Prism Awards, [South African Campaign of the Year](#), was also won by two independent agencies, Retroviral and Tribeca Public Relations.

Marking their 20th year, the Awards took place on Saturday at The Park House of Events on 7 at the Hyde Park Shopping Centre in Sandton 2017.



## From zero to hero

This was the most successful year at the Prism Awards for the young agency, Clockwork Media, having gone from having never won at the Awards, to not only winning the most awards of any agency, but also Silver for Best Large Consultancy.

Clockwork Media's MD, Tom Manners is honest about the agency's success. "We are really happy with our performance at the Prism Awards. We have never won before and last year we consciously made it a goal of ours to do well at the Awards."

Winning at the Prism Awards is important, he says. “The Prism Awards are the benchmark of the South African PR industry, and peer reviewed. When you enter, you are competing with the best in the industry. Therefore, our success this year is a watershed, because we feel that we are playing with the best.”

For him the high point was being awarded Silver for the Best Large Consultancy – the highest award for the category (no gold was awarded). He says it was the award he wanted to win. “When we started the agency, we wanted to build a business not based on the old archetype, so this award is an acknowledge of the new model we are building.”

Going forward, the agency will build on this success. “We are building a great agency and will continue to refine this. We have broadened our scope already including skills such as research and more strategy, and now we will build on this momentum.”

This includes geographical growth. “We want to be the best and biggest in Africa. We already do work on the continent and we are expanding this. We are in conversation in East and West Africa regarding this. We are also expanding our business from our London office. In four to five years we want to be on the global stage.”

Today’s PR agencies need to be agile and to move quickly while embracing what PR should be. “This is happening very quickly and was recognised at the Prism Awards, with the most successful agencies all independent ones.”

## Providing leverage

PR Worx won 11 Awards, including a Silver for its campaign 'Mimi Women Shock Box' for Mimi Women in the South African Campaign of the Year Awards and Bronze in Best Mid-Sized Consultancy.

Madelain Roscher, PR Worx MD, says winning a Prism is testament to producing top quality work. “Winning 11 Prisms this year alone is really incredible and a great honour for us because it means we’re clearly doing something right by outperforming multinational and global PR firms. As an independently-owned full service marketing communications firm, being awarded in the Campaign of the Year and Mid-Size Consultancy categories elevates PR Worx’s standing and credibility in the industry.”

She adds that the recognition they have received at the Prism Awards has given them further leverage in tenders and potential business opportunities, which has also helped them set up an independent network consisting of 25 agencies across Africa,

“Having now won 35 Prism Awards in five years helps us in attracting high calibre, professional staff and in retaining our employees. Being part of an award-winning firm gives our staff a great deal of pride. Knowing that we give credit where it is due creates healthy internal competition among the teams and motivates them to perform at a higher standard.”



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## It takes a village

Three-year-old agency Engage Joe Public may only comprise a staff of eight, but it punches above its weight as its five Prism Awards, one of which included a Silver for Best Small Consultancy (no gold was awarded) has proven. No wonder managing partner of Engage Joe Public, Keri-Ann Stanton is absolutely thrilled. “Awards are subjective and different

awards have different criteria, so generally I have zero expectations from Awards, but I am absolutely thrilled for my team. It takes a village to do courageous work and being recognised as a bit of an odd ball maverick only makes you more courageous to take that next step.”

## A growing industry

A decorated Prism Award winner and probably the most awarded agency when it comes to the Prisms, for Atmosphere Communications, this year was no different. The agency not only took home 10 awards including a Silver for its #ConspicuousSaving for Sanlam in the South African Campaign of the Year, but took home the highest award given this year in the Mid-Sized Consultancy, a Silver. Nicola Nel, Atmosphere MD, says it is encouraging to see that independent agencies are winning awards. “It shows we have a healthy industry that is competitive and growing.”

## Lots of fun

Another South African Campaign of the Year finalist is ByDesign. While the agency is a newcomer to the industry and the Awards, its founder and director, Kevin Welman, is not. Having previously headed up Fleishman Hillard, Welman is accustomed to winning awards. ByDesign was one of the five finalists in the South African Campaign of the Year for the launch of #VaginaVaristy, a campaign it also won a gold Prism Award for in the Healthcare category. “Being involved in this campaign in the first few months of our existence was just amazing. I feel we pushed the boundaries not only for our client, but for the entire sector. It is also some of the best work and most fun I have been involved in since starting my career in public relations 20 years ago.”

The Prism Awards are judged in eight clusters, as well as the African Campaign of the Year and the Campaign of the Year.

## 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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