

Drugstore: Bringing big businesses tech-pain relief

 By Leigh Andrews

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Problem: Lack of collaboration, innovation and knowledge-sharing between 'big business' and small tech startups.

Solution: Publicis Machine Drugstore.

Publicis Machine is further proving its title as South Africa's fastest growing digitally-led integrated communications agency with the recent launch of Drugstore in South Africa.

Nothing to do with hard drugs, chemistry or an old-school apothecary, instead this concept - founded by Publicis Worldwide and launched locally late in 2015 - is actually intended to bridge the gap between big brands and tech startups by providing a platform to facilitate engagement and fuel game-changing ideas.

That's because while big brands are operationally efficient and filled with worker bees buzzing around efficiently, they have so much going on that they just can't keep track of the latest tech developments. Tech startups, on the other hand, have the digital aspect waxed but get lost in the world of big business. That's where Drugstore comes in. It offers a clear space for these seemingly separate entities to do a 'mind meld', for both to reap the benefits.

Publicis Machine's CEO, Adrian Hewlett, and head of group digital strategy, Andy Gilder, elaborate on what this means for the local market...



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1. Kicking off with context, elaborate on Publicis Machine's success as a digitally-led integrated communication agency.

Hewlett and Gilder: Our agency was born digital and entered the industry in 2004 as The Habari Group, with founder Adrian Hewlett at the helm. He was awarded for the Greatest Individual Contribution to Digital Media and Marketing in the 2010 Bookmark Awards. In 2012, several boutique agencies were combined to form MACHINE, which went on to win the AdReview 'Breakthrough Agency of the Year' in 2013, and just two years later the agency moved upstream to become Publicis Machine, now one of South Africa's leading integrated digitally focused agencies. Unlike other traditional agencies who have now incorporated digital (some, like Ogilvy, successfully and others not so well), we started out with a digital focus and Publicis Machine is now a fully integrated strategic communications agency, with a digital heartbeat.

A case in point is Drugstore - a digital-driven tech innovation accelerator that puts technology startups in partnership with the agency to deliver innovative solutions to its biggest clients. It illustrates the kind of initiative we have put in place to ensure our true integration, not only from a communication's perspective but also from an innovation perspective. It came about as the need to help our clients innovate became more important. It's also about understanding the increasing role that smaller businesses are going to be playing in the future of large business - and indeed how those large businesses can avoid being "Ubered". Drugstore is about finding the best way to marry innovation and enterprise, and Publicis Machine is the orchestrator of this process. Drugstore is a global Publicis initiative and South Africa is the fourth country to implement the concept. The other global Drugstore's are based in London, Sydney and Zurich.

2. Is there any potential confusion on the name, from the three existing global versions?

Hewlett and Gilder: The various global Drugstore initiatives form part of a single concept - a global network of startups that align with our business to help solve the problems of our clients. In time, we hope to leverage the interconnected nature of the initiative to bring in business from outside our shores to help solve local problems and vice versa.

3. How does Drugstore facilitate engagement and incubate game-changing ideas?

Hewlett and Gilder: As a digitally-led agency that believes strongly in leading the change for our clients, we're always eager to find new ways to provide better solutions to business problems. Drugstore allows us the opportunity to bring in technology experts with small, nimble and innovative teams, and combine them with established brands, to the benefit of both. As the strategic lead in the process, we ensure the innovative ideas that come from our start up partners align perfectly with the challenges that we know our clients have.

4. How has the concept of 'startup' changed from purely tech-centric companies to any new, up-and-coming potential disruptor?

Hewlett and Gilder: Technology is seemingly playing a role in just about every disruptive initiative we see today. While many people still use the term "startup" to refer specifically to businesses that deliver a product or service that involves technology, the reality is that very few businesses that launch in this day and age are devoid of technology - especially ones that have the core ideal of disruption close to their heart.

5. Should technology be a crucial factor in any business today?

Hewlett and Gilder: Undoubtedly. We're not advocating tech for the sake of it, but rather the natural integration of technology into a core product or service to make it better. Technology applied in the right way can so often take businesses from good to great, and more and more, the greatest disruptors are built on a solid foundation of technological skill.

6. What's the impact on consumers, whose idea of 'brand promise' has shifted in today's digital age?

Hewlett and Gilder: As consumers' perceptions shift, so too must brands. We believe that consumer expectations are already in a place where they demand a brand must have a level of embedded technology (or at the very least, understand how consumers use technology). Drugstore is not just a means to solve this increased level of expectation on the brand promise, but to anticipate what is still to come and to try to deliver on that in the short term.

7. Explain the concept of 'managed incubation'.

Hewlett and Gilder: We refer to a managed incubator as more than a simple dedicated workspace for startups to work from. In this case, we not only provide the physical space and business challenges to solve, we also strategically guide the entire process from briefing to solution stage - with constructive feedback provided during organised check-in sessions and extending to assisting each team with their final execution and delivery. The Publicis Machine strategy team works

alongside the various startup companies in solving the problem at hand - it means we not only benefit from the input from a few specialists in their verticals, but also use our knowledge of the existing business challenges to help shape the innovation solution that the incubator attendees deliver.

That's it in a nutshell. Exciting, inspiring and future-shaping. Find out more from the [Cape Town Drugstore website](#). You can also [click here](#) for more on Publicis Machine, visit their [press office](#) or follow their [Twitter feed](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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