

with... Arthur Charles van Wyk

This week, we find out what's really going on behind the selfie with Arthur Charles van Wyk, CEO of Fluence marketing agency...



This selfie contains everything Van Wyk needs to get through a day at work when he has no outside meetings. Tea, food, an online device, stationery caddy, mini whiteboard and red notebook from Ogilvy. There's also a stack of CDs between his head and the monitor – those that he hasn't yet digitised for listening to on his phone yet.

1. Where do you live, work and play?

I live in a suburb named Asherville, five minutes outside the Durban CBD and currently work wherever the work is. The business is relocating to Umhlanga Rocks from Musgrave, so myself and the team work wherever we are - for now. Play includes walks on the Durban beachfront with my youngest daughter Nia, going shopping for books and taking naps - lots of them. Doing so keeps me creative... just [ask Arianna Huffington](#).

2. What's your claim to fame?

I have three, but I'm not really famous for any of them.

1. I was one half of the duo (RIP Patrick van Sleight) that "strung" together the very first website for the University of the Western Cape in 1995, two years ahead of UCT, which didn't get their first website until 1997.
2. I'm the brains behind what was South Africa's first entertainment social network. We called them virtual communities in the 1990s and I launched Urbantainment in 1997. It became the very first digital platform for promoting Big Concerts' "Peter Stuyvesant Music Spectaculars". It also led to other small innovations in my daytime job with Ticketweb at the time. We innovated communication and boosted ticket sales by introducing call centre assistance via Instant Messaging, when broadband was unheard of. The insights that drove these innovations were gleaned off of Urbantainment.
3. The last one is something I created out of sheer frustration. I started working at the MTN call centre in Durban in 2001. Almost 90% of the information clients needed was on paper. I got so tired of putting customers on hold to go borrow a phone manual or a process flowchart from my colleagues that I asked my supervisor for an hour off every day, and slowly put together KZNWEB - an information-rich intranet of sorts that contained everything a call centre agent would ever need to resolve calls of any nature with one blow. We later added communications functionality and a truckload of other bells and whistles. When I left in 2003, senior management at MTN jacked my creation, slapped some branding on it and deployed it globally. Most MTNers will know it as Yellowworld today.

3. Describe your career so far

My actual career is really only four years old. But to give you an overview...

I left UWC in 1997 to sell computers to healthcare NGOs and train their people to use MS Works, the predecessor to Office. Late in 1998 I was offered a job with Ticketweb as their Creative Head. I met my wife in the company chatroom, married her and moved to Durban in December of 2000. Outside of Ticketweb I was doing nightclub promotions, DJing, booking DJs, designing fliers for club gigs and eventually opened my own club on Castle Street in Cape Town, which was a major flop.

After moving to Durban, I worked as an employee for three different mobile companies until 2006 and left to launch a design and branding agency I named KOOLOOMA. I had great success helping to launch SMMEs into business, however a year later I shut up shop to become the head of marketing for a signage supplies company. It was here that I discovered the business benefits of digital marketing. I discarded all forms of traditional marketing and soon the company was selling big ticket items (100K - 400K) through my work online. I personally sold over R1 million-worth of signage profiles to clients that found the product online. Following a dispute with my employer over sales commission I wasn't paid for actually selling stuff, so decided that I may as well do what I did for my employer for many other companies by launching an agency.

In February 2011 I launched Fluence in my lounge with a PC, an internet connection and a handful of personal social media profiles. To date, we have done work for a handful of big brands and a slew of smaller regional ones. Our first client was a company that trains people to trade shares. Our second client was mobile phone manufacturer Alcatel One Touch. In 2013 we did some work for the Top Gear Festival and smashed the brief to pieces by selling 20% of the tickets to the show (around R3 million-worth) using zero media budget and just three social networks.

The clients we work with these days have more diverse needs, so I had to go back and dig in the crates for my design skills, media buying, OOH skills and few other tricks I stopped using back in 2007. So I am currently de-evolving back to the "broad creative" I once was... before digital marketing got hold of me.

4. Tell us a few of your favourite things

Something I haven't done since Christmas 2013 is to pour myself a double Chivas every Christmas and then put the bottle away until the next Christmas. I love book shopping with my daughter Nia, even though I haven't read a physical book in two years. I love reading, mostly business books. I'm reading the last book by Rabbi Daniel Lapin right now. I love travelling by public transport. Nothing keeps you more in touch with the people you market to than using public transport. An added benefit is that I can listen to audiobooks and not worry about gears, clutch, indicators etc. I love shoes. When my sister started her first teaching job in 1988, she amassed a huge collection of Gino Paoli shoes, I promised myself I will one day have my own collection of Italian shoes. I'm getting there slowly. Then lastly, this has nothing to do with business but I love being in church. Church does for me what retail therapy does for blondes with sugar daddies.

5. What do you love about your industry?

That it hinges so strongly on people. People are the main ingredient of marketing - digital or otherwise.

And that it evolves at a rate that few can keep up with. I've always loved reading and feeding my brain, so this constant state of flux is right up my alley.

6. What are a few pain points your industry can improve on?

From the digital side of the equation, we, the competent few, make what we do so seem easy. The result is that there are now thousands of people out there who think they can actually do what we do. So social media is now a part of the service offering of many companies and many young people are out there convinced they have what it takes to be a digital marketing professional just because they started a fan page for "X-Box 360 fans in Bronkhorstspuit" and have 2,000 fans on it.

I don't know where this originated, but many companies' decision makers feel that digital is not really marketing and therefore doesn't really command the same price tag. They believe they need it, but that it couldn't possibly cost as much as the retainers they pay established ad agencies.

We've started emulating the advertising industry by doing work for awards. Our agency won an award and we punt ourselves as an award-winning agency. But the award we won was for job creation and the reason we throw that around is because clients have also dumbed down to such an extent that they are more impressed by awards than whether the agency actually brought anything to the bottom line.

Marketing professionals working for agencies have been jumping ship en masse to go and work for former clients of the agencies that employed them. This is a money-saving tactic for the client, but it doesn't bode well for the person who jumps ship. Trust is broken and people in the industry talk.

7. Describe your average workday (if such a thing exists)

Up at 6am (sometimes 5am) when Nia has to leave for school. Watch eNCA to see what's popping politically and economically, switch to CNBC and BDTV for 30 minutes or so, then hop in the shower. Dry and get dressed, normally in jeans, a t-shirt and sandals. I whip out my iPad to make the to-do list for the day and then I get cracking. Linda (my wife) brings me breakfast and whilst having breakfast I get cracking with whatever I can do while still at home. This normally involves scheduling updates on Hootsuite and checking on the complete team's scheduled posts for and on behalf of clients. I then head out to whatever meetings, pitches, presentations or consultations I have diarised. If it's a first-time meeting with a prospect I replace the t-shirt and sandals with a pair of boboza kickers (sharp BEE tenderpreneur shoes) and a Paul Smith shirt. I normally work while I'm travelling too, since 80% of what we do happens online - which reminds me of how much I hate the iPhone 5's short battery life. After my meetings I head for the office or I head home - depending on the time. We close shop at 3pm. As the visionary behind the agency I technically never stop working, so I spend my afternoon delving into analytics, statistics, measuring and monitoring. My entire day is also consumed with WhatsApp messages. I don't like making voice calls unless I have to, but 90% of my communication is in words on some device or another. I spend 5pm to 7pm napping, which leaves me fresh to work again from 8pm until whenever I am ready for bed - normally around 2am. I literally sleep for just four hours a day in a bed next to my wife. Other than that, I also sleep when flying or travelling far by road.

8. What are the tools of your trade?

A device - desktop, laptop, phone, tablet; an internet connection; mental freshness; a strong understanding of who you are speaking to when you do what you do; insight and foresight; some level of education (you'd be surprised how much you'll need your standard 6 Algebra working for Fluence); and a reasonable understanding of code, be it rudimentary HTML or hectic Ruby on Rails. Code is power. Even our designers know a little code.

9. Who is getting it right in your industry?

A few of them. Quirk, Cerebra, Native. An agency to look out for is Jozi-based Avatar. Then Digitlab right here in Durban, and Cape Town's Creative Spark are both on a come-up.

10. What are you working on right now?

We've just started a social media campaign for an [almost-national soft drink company](#) and we are seeing great success in that area. We've also just signed up a UK-based organisation that trains and develops government intelligence operatives globally. It's not a top secret gig, but it requires a great amount of discretion, so that's all I'm going to say about that. Another exciting opportunity that has arisen is we acquired a spices brand that already has great distribution but lack brand footprint.

11. Tell us some of the buzzwords floating around in your industry at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself

'Content' is in overuse right now. It started off as a digital thing, but has now been adopted by PR agencies, publishers and the like.

'Big data' is floating around like crazy. 'Internet of Things' doesn't even exist, but it's being thrown around like a dodge ball.

'Engagement' is beginning to cheese me off too, despite its relevance and the word 'programmatic' has appeared in blog posts and on websites a bit too much since 2015 arrived.

12. Where and when do you have your best ideas?

When I cannot sleep at night and I just lie there trying to see the ceiling through my eyelids... I also find that when I go on long walks and start speaking to myself or to God, ideas just pop up out of nowhere.

13. What's your secret talent/party trick

I can do my best work when a deadline looms. The closer we are to the deadline, the better the outcome of whatever I am working on.

14. Are you a technophobe or a technophile?

Definitely a technophile. I don't care what anybody says, you cannot do business without technology, from cleaning your pool to warming your food. Technology is ubiquitous.

15. What would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

Lots of selfies taken by Nia on my iPad. The iPad and iPhone is set to sync.

16. What advice would you give to newbies hoping to crack into the industry?

No building can stand without a foundation. And the higher you want to go, the deeper your foundation should be. I know of a certain gentleman who delved a bit in social media and called himself certain things online. He had the luck of a company wanting to get out of an agency he was freelancing for, so they just took him on as a service provider for far less money than they paid the agency to manage their social media. This made him seem like he knew what he was doing. The founder of a certain intermediary agency that builds links between South Africans abroad and job opportunities here at home fell into the trap of thinking this gentleman had substance, so she recruited him into her agency. He did not last long. No

foundation.

So newbies, my advice is to go do the course at Vega or Red & Yellow School. You may find that by the time you graduate not much of what you learnt there is still relevant, but you will have a foundation.

17. Plug your contact details, punt yourself - list all the places people can find you/your work online...

[Personal Facebook](#)

[Personal Twitter](#)

[Personal Instagram](#)

[Personal blog](#)

[Personal email](#)

[Personal LinkedIn](#)

[Who's Who](#)

[Personal Slideshare](#)

[Personal Google+](#)

[Personal YouTube](#)

[Agency website](#)

[Agency Pinterest](#)

[Agency Facebook page](#)

*Interviewed by [Leigh Andrews](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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