

Sage advice for collaborating creatives

By [Devon Meerholz](#)

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The recent election of Cyril Ramaphosa to the ruling party's top job has lifted the country's mood like little else since the 2010 Fifa World Cup.



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Not only has our currency recovered to levels last seen before the finance minister debacle, but there's even talk of economic growth exceeding the 2% mark this year. There's a definite spring in the step of the middle class these days, that's for sure. Some high-level arguments have been put forward for all of this new-found happiness, but I wonder if South Africans finally seeing the silver lining instead of the cloud hasn't got something to do with Mr Ramaphosa reminding us of our post-1994 honeymoon period?

Before we got down to the painful nitty-gritty of constructing a more equitable South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa and Roelf Meyer were the beaming faces of what was possible through negotiation. These two chief negotiators for the ANC and NP, respectively, helped transform collaboration from the scourge of the struggle to the hope of the new democracy.

Basic advantage of collaboration

It's often been said that this spirit of negotiation, cooperation and collaboration that characterised our 1990s transition to democracy ensured that no side truly got what it wanted. Well, if one considers that 2018's much bigger South African economy is the result of former combatants choosing the boardroom over the battlefield, then does it really matter that one side didn't win 100% of 1994's tiny pie? Herein lies the basic advantage of collaboration. We can achieve so much more when we've all agreed to pull in the same direction.

I often think of the example of our negotiated rainbow nation when seated opposite another creative agency. Readers will know how it goes. Very often, clients will expect one agency to work with another in pursuit of a common, brand-boosting goal. Usually, the arrangement comes about because there's an existing anchor agency on board and the client has tasked a newcomer firm with undertaking some niche, specialised work that it does particularly well.

In the past, the natural reaction of both agencies was characterised by hostility. Of late, I have noticed a definite tendency in the world of marketing and advertising for agencies to accept their different strengths and to happily agree to work together for the greater good of the client. Perhaps this has something to do with the realisation that our economy is indeed expanding (as evidenced by the 2% GDP news above) and there's enough creative output to be consumed by rising brands.

Advice for collaborating creatives

Warm and fuzzy feelings aside, here's some sage advice for collaborating creatives:

It all comes from the client – reassurance that no one is being side-lined, clear working parameters to prevent needless territorial disputes and daily operational support to immediately provide the kind of clarity that fights fires are all needed from the client.

Swop, meet and exchange – embedding personnel in each other's organisations can help foster understanding and an appreciation of the different corporate cultures at play.

Get them excited about what you do – the people you thought might be a threat could end up being your best supporters. This is provided you get them hooked on what you do. Take the time to properly explain your offering to the other guys. It will be well worth it!

Be sensitive and don't shoot down ideas – remember that the agency people opposite you are likely also creatives and really invest themselves in their work. You'll win no friends, and no long-term, pitch-winning support from the other guys if you shoot them down at every opportunity.

Proactively plan for the future – seeing the somewhat forced working arrangement as an opportunity to approach each other's clients for future business will help get the current project off to a stellar start. Go to it!

ABOUT DEVON MEERHOLZ

Devon Meerholz is Chief Creative Officer at IMmobile, a global software and solutions group with a presence in over 60 countries worldwide. Devon's unique approach to creativity is put to good use at IMmobile's Johannesburg office. Here he works with a multidisciplinary team to develop SA-specific mobile initiatives from bank statements to cross-platform personalised marketing videos that enable the company's clients to speak to current and potential customers in more visual, appealing and creative ways.

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