

Panning the digital specialist judges

 By Leigh Andrews

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Digital advice ranging from a selection of the 2016 Bookmark Awards' specialist judges: Start making use of analytics from the start of campaigns and get ready for the rise of personalised, segmented marketing.



Van Tonder, Davies, Stiles, Smith, Beale

An incredible amount of effort was put into finding the most appropriate and experienced judges for the various Bookmarks categories. For example, Alex van Tonder, creative and content director at theconceptphase.org; Leila Davies of Worldwide Creative; Graeme Stiles, group head of organic search at Quirk; Victoria Smith, head of analytics at Saatchi & Saatchi Synergize; and [John Beale](#), owner of Eight Thinking; are just 5 of this year's 20-strong [judges](#) on specialist digital aspects like organic search and email across all the entry categories. Here, they exclusively share their insights into judging this year's entries...

1. What are you most looking forward to from this year's IAB Digital Summit & Bookmark Awards?

Van Tonder: It's always good to see where we're doing well and where our blind spots are as an industry. I'm looking forward to awarding work that delivers results, stimulating discussion over learnings, a coming together of the industry's best minds and collectively looking at how we're going to change and grow to better help our clients achieve their business objectives in the coming year, based on our learnings coming out of the summit.

Davies: Seeing what our country is capable of with regard to ideas that bring in results. I have not been disappointed! I've been inspired, in fact.

Stiles: I'm looking forward to the increased focus on the performance marketing aspect of digital marketing at this year's summit. Topics like programmatic buying and native advertising still cause a lot of confusion so it will be great to hear the thoughts of industry leaders on these topics. This also goes for topics like ad blocking and click fraud that have a direct impact on the effectiveness of our campaigns. Insights from industry leaders will go a long way to dispelling some of the myths and confusion surrounding these topics.

Smith: I'm looking forward to seeing exceptional talent and ideas rewarded. Since these awards are focussed on real results, I am excited to see what the brightest minds in this industry have achieved in the last year.

Beale: I'm hoping to see some progression in the digital discussion from last year's summit to 2016, along with that a forward view on what we can expect in SA digital media industry

2. Share some pointers on your personal judging process and what you're looking for from entrants in your category.

Van Tonder: Going through the work this year I've been focused on two things: understanding the client's objectives relative to the ideas being presented, and whether the ideas being presented work. I'm also looking for brands that are using the wealth of data available to them to drive insights and creativity: what worked in the past, what was learned, how those learnings were adapted and improved on, how the work was moved forward. Numbers without business objectives don't interest me as much. Why do you want the numbers, the views, the likes? To what commercial end?

Davies: Innovation, with the results. It's all good and well to have brilliant ideas, but if they don't bring in the needed results, they aren't doing what the client has requested or what they need – and that doesn't hit the mark for me. By the same token, simply using new ad types isn't innovative – if it's combined with a well thought-out strategy that pushes the limits and drives inspiration, then hooray! But if not, then it's not pushing the boundaries enough.

Stiles: I am excited this year that there's a focus on bringing subject matter experts into the judging process to lend insights and advice to their specific areas of expertise. This allows for a bigger focus on the metrics that matter to each discipline. I'll be looking for hard data to back up the work submitted. It's important that the work submitted not only have a clever and well-executed idea, but that it was also effective for the client and their bottom line. The campaign may look fancy, but did it deliver value to the client? That is the core question.

Smith: I believe in giving each entry due care. Therefore, I assign sufficient time to evaluate each entry on its respective strengths and place that individual performance into context. Performance is always relative, so putting the numbers into perspective ensures that I understand just how incredible the results are. I'm looking for innovative work in fields that are traditionally considered rigid. It's inspiring to see the ever-changing technology at our disposal used in new and amazing ways. Innovation (adding real value to clients) really stands out as a result.

Beale: The Bookmarks have always been focused on results and I'm focusing even more heavily on seeing brand-/product-/service-related results from digital campaigns. The days of 'fans and engagements' are done. We need to see digital also delivering the business results, at the scale it can now provide, so that's what I'm looking for.

3. Elaborate on the overall standard of digital work in SA. Where do we shine and what's still lacking?

Van Tonder: We shine in mobile, especially compared to work I've seen in some first-world countries. Our retail and online commerce brands are doing work on a par with international brands, and this sector seems to be leading the category as it's useful to customers – they're there to shop, it's conducive to narrative-based rather than functional content, you don't

have to trick customers into seeing your posts as they're looking for them. We fall short in analytics and data-driven creative big time. We see analytics as an afterthought, something you do afterwards to measure if it worked, instead of the skeleton off which a lot of our thinking should hang and the insights that should lead the briefs. We're getting better at understanding how to engage customers without annoying them or disrupting them, but we have a long way to go when it comes to building strong narrative-driven social. All in all, we're progressing, which is a good sign.

Davies: It is quite a difficult space. There are a lot of amazingly talented people out there – technically and creatively – but often client budgets don't really allow for those to really do their thing. As a whole, companies doing the digital work for clients need to be more assertive with regards to their suggestions or recommendations – clients are hiring them for a reason and all too often campaign ideas get totally watered down to the bare minimum because the client has said it must be so. We are too scared; we need to be bolder. We need to be hungry to do things, hungry enough to push the limits, not settle for what we always have done. Then we can put more work out there that we are proud of and gets the results set out for us. It's a big shift to make, but I am seeing more agencies doing this, which is great. We just need to be authentic in what we do, while we grow as an industry.

Stiles: On the whole we are steadily improving, there's a shift from purely digital work into a more general space where campaigns play in an above- and below-the-line space. This leads to some great campaign ideas and concepts, and the quality of work is really growing in leaps and bounds. The challenge is to make sure we bring the core values of digital into this new space. We need to keep our focus on work that delivers value. Let's use the data available to us and our clients to make better decisions and increase the effectiveness of our campaigns. Let's set measurable targets and hold ourselves accountable to achieving value for clients in both a creative and performance marketing space.

Smith: There's a great appetite for the digital space in SA, but countries abroad still hold the edge, and are more invested in using digital data at the heart of strategies. I'd like to see data shine more in South Africa; not just as evidence of performance, but also as a springboard that drives strategies from the start. I believe we're lacking more personalised, segmented marketing that is more relevant to individuals. All the same, I'm optimistic.

Beale: Where we lack is still in being innovative in channel, and still being isolated in the digital approach, without seeing full campaign integration. But creatively we're on par with anywhere else in the world, and we tap into some great insights for local relevance, especially in some unique mobile campaigns I've seen.

Exciting times! If you're eager to delve in deeper into digital, click through to [this podcast](#) interview with Josephine Buys, CEO of IAB South Africa, to find out more about the highly anticipated IAB Digital Summit & Bookmark Awards 2016, taking place at Turbine Hall in Johannesburg on 3 March 2016. [Click here](#) for the full list of Bookmarks 2016 judges and [here](#) for the full list of finalists and watch for our in-depth coverage.

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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