

# Unilever's Justin Apsey on purpose-driven marketing



By [Ann Nurock](#)

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Ann Nurock spoke to [Justin Apsey](#), Vice President of Brand Building Home & Surface Care at [Unilever](#) during the Loeries Creative Week Durban. Unilever won one gold, three silver and seven bronze at the awards on Saturday and Sunday night...



Apsey touches on the points of purpose-driven marketing and how important it is for agencies and marketers, as well as the difference of marketing *for people* as opposed to marketing *with people*.

**Nurock: Why is the Loeries so important for you?**

**Apsey:** I think the world is becoming so cluttered, and it's so difficult to breakthrough with your messages in the marketplace, and therefore it's all going to be about behaviour change. Cut-through and breakthrough creativity is going to play a key part in that.

**Nurock: It's proven time and again that great creativity drives brand growth...**

**Apsey:** Absolutely! I don't think this idea of creativity and effectiveness is separate, it never should be. Actually now more than ever they are merged, and the whole thing that we're all driving for is behaviour change. This purpose space is where we want to be because we believe that's the space where we can be trusted by consumers, but we need help, we need to collaborate with people.

Brands are in people's homes every day, and consumers want to help save the world. They want to be part of it. So we have to find ways to help them help the world, and this marketing *for people* is a fantastic space!

**Nurock: Elaborate on marketing *for people*...**

**Apsey:** It's a new terminology that's starting and it's actually quite easy. The simplest way I think about it is that there used to be something called marketing to people and broadcasting. Unilever was very good at that. Then this concept of marketing *with* people came - social is the best example of that - where you get people into your organisation and curated content by individuals, allowing them to create it for your brand to be open in that space.

The marketing for people space is actually providing opportunity for people to get involved, because the slight nuance of this whole *with people* and *for people* thing is that people have lots of opinions in the social space. So how do we as brands take that energy, focus, drive and say come with us and here's how you can play with us, and then allow this to organically grow into something that's bigger and better. The great thing about *for people* is that it's not just for the consumer, it's for agencies, it's for NGOs, it's for the public sector and everyone getting together for movement towards positive change within the environment and the space.

**Nurock: What is your best example in South Africa for marketing for people?**

**Apsey:** I think there's two to be honest: Life Buoy is a fantastic example that allows people to help diarrhoea-stricken areas and give a better life to consumers. And it's just by simple handwashing. Yes, we sell soap, but it's not just to make profits, we did it because healthy societies are good for us and are good for business. So that's a fantastic example of people getting involved and that's what's getting UNICEF involved with us along with the public sector, the government and department of education.

The next one is sanitation, yes you can be cynical and say sanitation has become a voting issue in our country. But sanitation is a fundamental human right, particularly for little girls. You know in South Africa, girls lose significant parts of their schooling because of the menstruation cycle and sanitation is so bad. By working now with UNICEF and government, putting it out there on social media, we are getting donations and work in to effect change. If you buy a Unilever Domestos product, a percentage of that goes into a UNICEF programme, which goes into schools and talks about sanitation that builds better behaviour, builds better toilets and drives a much better business solution.

**Nurock: Can you tell us more about Unilever's programme with Ola ice cream?**

**Apsey:** We talked about business solutions, and we found out that availability is the key driver of ice creams. Lots of people in this country are struggling for jobs. We decided to start a project where we could bring vendors in, properly trained and financially stocked. Over the course of three years we're going to put about 5000 vendors out onto the streets, we're about 1000 into that, and it's growing from a piece of work that wasn't all about consumption. This is something that is good and people like buying from a vendor. It's good for our brand, it's good for communities, and funnily enough is actually one of our best return on investments we have as well.

**Nurock: With purpose comes purchase, and you don't have to have purpose-driven brands at the expense of growth...**

**Apsey:** That was always what our shareholders said when we started the UNICEF "sustainable living brands" - how will this contribute to growth. If you look globally now, the brands which we call "sustainable living brands" are growing at twice the speed of our existing brands and generated up to 50% of our growth. The same is true in our South African business, you know Tim Lindsay, CEO D&AD, spoke about the idea of a purpose dividend and people are buying into this, they are voting towards things that do good in society, and we need to get on board.

I would encourage marketers and agencies to look into this. Tim made a really good point by telling four of his key rules: get on board, because if you don't someone else will; put your money where your mouth is; join the collaboration, stop trying to make it all about yourself; and find different revenue models and different ways of reward for people who generate this purpose dividend.

**Nurock: What in your opinion are the greatest challenges facing agencies in terms of creativity?**

**Apsey:** That's a good question because you could argue that the things that are getting interest are getting more and more silly by the day, and therefore it's easy to be noticed if you're stupid. I mean porn and cats online are huge. So the challenge for an agency is how do you keep that creativity and breakthrough into a world that's becoming increasingly difficult. Keith Weed spoke about attention spans and how it's dropped from 10 seconds to eight seconds. My advice, I think marketers are open for creativity, but you've got to come to this area of purpose and play to those four things Tim mentioned.

**Nurock: Especially in a country like South Africa where we have more than a handful of problems, brands need to look into what they can do...**

**Apsey:** Absolutely. In South Africa we have a lot of social ills, a have a youthful generation that is heavily unemployed and if you think about what that kind of environment is going to look like five years from now, it could be quite devastating. One thing is clear, we've tried to work in markets where society has failed and that's not going to work. I believe you need a youthful society to run a good business, you've got to work in that area and focus in that space with what you're going to do. All I can do is to encourage others to start. You've got to keep purpose close to your business model, you've got to save things that are pertinent to your consumers and society, but it must be close to your brand otherwise it won't have longevity.

**Nurock: At the Apex Awards you said something that was really interesting, and that is that agencies have to trust each other more. What advice have you got for agencies as a whole going forward?**

**Apsey:** The first thing I'm going to reiterate again is get on board with a purposeful mission, understand that there's opportunity there. Like I spoke about at Apex, my biggest concern now is the fragmentation of the specialist environments, digital is a very good example of that. We used to have the benefit of agencies leading us through the murky world of advertising, and then a couple of years ago we had digital rosters because we had to understand digital, then you needed social and data and this and that. We've now ended up with all these specialists who are all really good at their jobs and creating these different environments where they optimise solutions and channels. This is now actually becoming increasingly confusing for marketers who are becoming project managers, which is not our job. I fear that the brand is getting lost through that experience, the consumer is not seeing how it's all working together.

So my view on agencies is that I want to see more collaboration, and not just advertising agencies, I want to see it with media agencies as well. There's a long debate in the industry - do you start the idea in the media, or do you start the idea at the agency - and they need to get together again. You need to create one seamless experience and orchestrate it for us as clients, sell us the dream, make it easy for us to understand, allow that trust to exist between you because you'll get the trust back from us. At the moment I'm not sure I'm getting the best for my buck, because I'm getting fragmented through the entire environment. So come together, work together, work a lot harder together and create.

**Nurock: What was interesting about what you said is that each agency wants 100% for themselves, and as a marketer what you're saying is that you want 100% for the brand...**

**Apsey:** I know it's easy for me to say that, but if we don't do that we risk collapsing the industry, the margins will get squeezed and creativity will die, because we'll just go for the mundane, the simple thing, the one that we actually know. We don't need that, we're evolving so quickly as an industry and this idea of orchestration to create a branded experience that consumers feel and see, that is unlocked through the power of all these wonderful new channels that we have, that's what we want. We just don't want to play the game and play all the tunes ourselves, we want to be inspired and driven. You asked me earlier, how can we create great creativity, you sell me an idea that's creative and solves all those things, I'll buy it tomorrow.

**Nurock: How many finalists do you have at Loeries this year?**

**Apsey:** So we're just short of 30 finalists this year, and that's gone from three years ago having less than four. What I really like about this for us is that we had 56 entries this year from multiple brands, agencies and countries on this continent, so I like about this is the diversity I'm seeing coming out of our organisation, I'm inspired by what I'm seeing

coming from the agencies, and I'm inspired by what I'm seeing coming from my own organisation, I just want more of it now.

## ABOUT ANN NUROCK

Ann is a Partner at Relationship Audits and Management, a global consultancy that measures and optimizes client /agency relationships. Her proprietary Radar tool is used by 30 corporates globally and as a result she interacts with over 80 agencies of all disciplines. Ann spent 25 years plus in the advertising industry as CEO of Grey Advertising South Africa, and head of the Africa region followed by President and CEO of Grey Canada. Contact details: [ann.nurock@relationshipaudits.com](mailto:ann.nurock@relationshipaudits.com) | Twitter [@Annnurock](https://twitter.com/Annnurock)

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