

#OutofOffice is where great brands are built

 By Jessica Taylor

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Out of Office is no longer just an automatic reply, but a new talk series that features inspirational, informative and high-profile speakers in unusual spaces, and also what marketers and brand managers alike ought to be if they're to make any meaningful difference in the lives of consumers.



Ian Fuhr, Founder of the Sorbet Group; Mke Silver, MD of Stretch Experiential Marketing; and Avukile Mabombo, Brand Manager of Amstel Lager.

At Stretch Experiential Marketing's #OutofOffice launch at the Air Yoga Studio, Woodstock Exchange on Friday, 21 November at 3:30pm, MD Mike Silver explained the "inspirational faces in unusual spaces" slogan in two parts.

Firstly, "in terms of speakers, we wanted a broad mix of individuals, from creatives to entrepreneurs, to client-side folk, to media, to government etc. The traditional format is usually focused on clients or agencies only and we felt this limited our ability to inspire."

And secondly, to change the traditional office mindset, "we looked at using venues that are not normally used for gatherings of these sorts. This also allows us to engage start-ups in the content, not only with their space, but also a showcasing of their craft".

So after an intro meditation session, guest speaker Ian Fuhr, Founder of the Sorbet Group presented the subject of his bestselling biography, *Get that Feeling*, and the "power lessons" he learnt on his hilarious journey to success and what that truly means. While Avukile Mabombo, Brand Manager of Amstel Lager presented a talk titled *Freeing the Token Blacks*, which was basically about the South African advertising and marketing world's need to properly understand the new emerging black middle class consumer.



Fuhr's first "power lesson" so to speak, was that "there is no one group superior or inferior to another. We are all just different and the sooner we learn to respect and tolerate our differences, the better off our country will be." And second, "You cannot ignore the socio-political environment in which your employees are forced to live." But perhaps his most powerful lesson of all, has been the shift in his understanding of success. It used to mean "power, influence, lifestyle, fast cars, fast women...", but now it's about making a difference in people's lives.

The 9-5 of marketing. No such thing.

And on that note, Mabombo is convinced that it's not the stuff you do in the office that makes the real difference. "Brands

are not built in the office." There is no such thing as "the 9-5 of marketing". In other words, you can't expect to grow a brand and do amazing things from your desk.

"The great brands of this world are going to be built by people who actually are out there engaging with their customers and at the forefront of new developments, as opposed to people who know how to operate their computers properly ... It's surprising how many people run brands and find out info about their consumers by googling."

Steve Jobs of Apple once said, "Get closer than ever to your customers. So close that you tell them what they need well before they realise it themselves." Mabombo believes that like Steve Jobs, marketers need to be creating demands before the demand happens. "If we're going to sit back and be following what our consumers are telling us, we're always going to be on the back foot."

Take the iPod for instance. "MP3 players were a much more convenient way of sharing music. But he actually made us download iTunes, made it harder for us to get and share music... because he made it cool. So when you get to that level, where we're inconvenienced just to share and be part of a brand, that's when we're really starting to make a difference. But you need to be connected to what's happening on the ground to be able to do that."



He also quoted Albert Einstein: "Imagination is more important than knowledge." And you get that imagination by being out there, by getting out of the office and actually interacting with people.

"So you want to know about the black market, X, Y, Z, this is how we do it. But that's not how insights work. You learn by doing, by getting out there, and actually gaining insights in effective ways."

#OutOfOffice gatherings take place quarterly, with the next edition in February/March 2015. For more info on the series or to sign up for the next gathering, email info@stretchexp.com.

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