

The power of timing in creative ideas

 By Leigh Andrews

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Yesterday, I covered Red & Yellow's Digital Agency Showcase, featuring six of the top SA digital agencies, according to this year's IAB Bookmark Awards. In the final session of the day, which showcased the spirit of innovation and keeping pace with technology, Matt Ross, founder and CCO at King James Digital, presented from his iPhone.

“ “Tell stories when you present your ideas.” - [@KingJamesGroup #DigitalAgencyShowcase](#)
[pic.twitter.com/EEkNDjl2Zp](#)— Red & Yellow School (@RedAndYellowEd) [October 25, 2018](#) ”

Cape Town's creative set streamed into the event at the Red & Yellow Creative School of Business in Salt River – both literally and figuratively – as it was also live-streamed.

Chairman Rob Stokes kicked off the day explaining it was set to be filled with visionary learning, as it featured speakers from six of the country's top digital agencies, according to the IAB's Bookmark Awards. Red & Yellow loves knowledge and all things digital, so who better for their alumni and associates to learn from, in order to stay at the cutting edge?

There will be more to come on the first five speakers of the day over the coming week, because to keep things interesting, I'm skipping ahead to the final session of the day, by sharing those key points first.

Stokes introduced Matt Ross with the words, “His last minute on earth would be spent on the Glen D'Arcy 6-2 surfboard, getting barrelled, while watching the *Big Short*, with his three ladies, reading Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim*, and swilling a Grundbergen beer, with Christopher Nolan and Trent Reznor.”



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Leigh Andrews 21 Feb 2018



As it was the final presentation of the day, Ross explained what he was *not* going to do – he would not evangelise about digital or talk about AI, AR, VR or blockchain. Nor did he punt the agency. Instead, he spoke both broadly and specifically about King James' creative process, as portions of it are indeed unique.

He added that **advertising is not an exact science**. The likes of Google, Facebook and big data are trying to pin it down

but the jury is still out on whether they will succeed. That said, we have to get used to the idea of advertising as a huge, confusing melee, as no one really understands the millions of variations on how to get ideas into customers' minds.

He used work from a single client - Sanlam - to illustrate three ways they get this right at the agency.

Thing 1: Luke Flynn is an idiot

Luke Flynn is not a famous figure. Ross explained that he's a creative based in London, and a great academic about creativity itself, often trawling YouTube for hours, looking at the best ads, signing up to all the email newsletters, to flood his inbox every morning. He'd examine the work that won at big award shows and knew everything about everything, with references.

But what Luke had was also a big problem, because at a certain point, Luke could no longer distinguish what was his idea and what came from work he'd seen.

Ross said this leads to an idea that's usually divorced from creativity in advertising – psychology. It tends to fall to the strategists, but can an understanding of the consumer psyche can help get the best work out.



What's in it for me?

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Ross recommends reading Cialdini's *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, to see for yourself. It's psychology that led the King James team to the idea of the psychology of funerals and how the grief inherent in funerals encourages family members and friends to do and say things dramatically, not as they would do ordinarily.

Soap operas have known this for years.



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It's also about recognising the specific social behaviour of funerals in South Africa, and recognising how unique that is to our country.

Additionally, Ross says it's important to note *where* that behaviour is taking place – it's a technical or mechanical point, but also the right point: The amount of drama and brilliance taking place on Whatsapp in South Africa, in groups and direct communication among families is enormous.

The marriage of these three insights is what led to their *Uk'shona Kwelanga* work for Sanlam's MyChoice funeral product:

Thing 2: Wrong time, wrong place?

Ross showed an image of Leonard Cohen, describing him as perhaps one of the most important and famous musicians of the 20th Century, having written the song *Hallelujah*.

Ross said to think of the song as the idea and Cohen as the client. One night, he played his version of the song at the art deco Beacon Ballroom to a live audience. In the audience was John Kale, who started the avant-garde Velvet Underground rock group. Kale was blown away and wanted to do a version.

Cohen faxed him the 15 pages of music and lyrics. Kale created his version of the song, which appeared in the French tribute, *I'm a Fan*. A woman called Janine fished it out of a bargain bin in a small record shop in Brooklyn. She passed it on to young up-and-coming musician Jeff Buckley, when he house-sat for her.

Buckley then listened to Kale's version, liked it and decided to record a version of Kale's version.

He played his version in a small bar in New York's East Village. A Columbia record executive was in the audience that night and signed Buckley to the label. The song was included when Buckley created *Grace*, his only ever studio album, a few months later. But it's only after Columbia pushed the record out again after Buckley drowned fully clothed in the Mississippi River, that the record received acclaim. Ross said:

“ *Death sells, and hey presto, the album and the song both went platinum.* ”

Ross said to remember that litany, and realise that **sometimes an idea just needs the right time and the right place** – he recommends reading *The Holy of the Broken* by Alan Light for more on the story.

Next, Ross spoke of 20Twenty, the first 'branch-less bank' to launch in SA in 2005. Ross says the agency helped launch the bank with some OK advertising – one of his favourites was parking a demolition crane outside an Absa building, with the

demolition ball reading, “Banking is necessary, banks are not.”

King James also pitched an idea to 20Twenty that they didn’t buy, saying the bank was that specific idea’s Leonard Cohen. Nine years later, King James client Sanlam became the ‘One Rand Man’ idea’s Jeff Buckley.

Ross said it illustrates the point that not only that idea that may not have happened if Sanlam hadn’t bought into it, as it opened up a whole doorway to a creative area and platform of the One Rand Family, Conscious Savers and Mna Nam they’ve been mining together ever since.

“ Every good idea has a home. If you’re a creative at an agency, there’s no home in keeping on selling it. If you’re a client and your agency says, ‘We’ve taken this idea somewhere else and they didn’t buy it,’ don’t turn it down in a fit of jealousy. ”

Because the result might be what happened for an old brand like Sanlam, which King James took to effectively remodel and contemporise.

Thing 3: Selling gold to Tuthankamen

In answering questions from the audience, Ross said **TV-first is still a thing**, and rightly so as broadcast in SA is still a very relevant medium.

He spoke of using existing channels as much as they can, and then working their way back from that, from a budget perspective. Whatever they have left, like with the *Uk’Shona* campaign, gets pushed to billboards and other above-the-line media.

“ “Creatives have to understand psychology to get the best work out.” - straight from the horse’s ([@KingJamesGroup](#)) mouth. [#DigitalAgencyShowcase pic.twitter.com/TVvt5sFMIV](#)— Red & Yellow School (@RedAndYellowEd) [October 25, 2018](#) ”

Stokes concluded that they will definitely hold another showcase next year. Watch for more of my [#DigitalAgencyShowcase](#) coverage, and follow [Red & Yellow School](#) and [King James Group’s King James Digital](#) for further insights – Ross himself ‘doesn’t do social media’.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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