

#BehindtheSelfie with... Matt Ross

 By Leigh Andrews

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This week, we go behind the selfie with technophile Matt Ross, chief creative officer at King James Digital.



Ross captions this: "Midget Friar Tuck and I enjoying a funeral in the jungle."

1. Where do you live, work and play?

I live under a mountain, work on a plane, and play Raven Killer Horses vs Miami Puta Club Barbie with my kids. Those horses eat a lot of innocent Barbies. Heads being a particularly popular body part. Which means I have a lot of headless Barbies in my house. Disconcerting for many visitors. But, at least the body shaming is kept to a minimum.

2. What's your claim to fame?

Fame? Two questions in, and you've managed to jam a fat thumb onto one of my biggest buttons. I don't have a claim to fame. In fact, I detest it. The teams and partners I work and have worked with over the last 20 years of my career have the claims to my fame. People will read that as a self-serving bit of humbleness... I'll let those that know me judge me on that. Any client that chooses an agency based on the profile of an individual will oscillate between complete disappointment and downright disaster. The work should have the fame!

3. Describe your career so far.

Sweat and tears of both pain and joy. But, mainly pain. This is not an easy way of life. There's a reason that only 1% of people in advertising are over the age of 45. I started in ATL, then went startup, then pure-play digital, then founded my own agency, then went back to an integrated network agency, then independent at King James to found Punk, which rebranded to King James Digital last year.



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KJ serves my entrepreneurial instincts with the support of a group agency. I'm the most content I've ever been. My restlessness has served me well.

4. Tell us a few of your favourite things.

The usual that will bore everyone else sh!tless but are interesting to me. My kids. My family and friends. Japan. Scotland. That realisation you woke up way early but still have two hours before you need to get up. Friday nights. Sunday mornings. Emmanuel Lubezki. Roger Deakins. Leftfield. Roots Manuva. Shigeru Umebayashi. Ludovico Einaudi. Basquiat. Takashi Murakami. Miyazaki. Maybe Japan should be at the top of this list. Go. It will change your life.

5. What do you love about your industry?

Different things every day. I even had a client ask if we could babysit her kids. I told her we'd do it only if we could introduce them to *Night of the Living Dead*. She passed. No respect for the genius of George Romero. Or popcorn. Then again, I remember sleeping with the light on for two years after watching the devil come out of the ground at the end of *Children of the Corn*. That terrified me. It was in a wheat field. Clearly, Satan is not gluten intolerant.

6. Describe your average workday, if such a thing exists.

Smacked on the head by Elsa Barbie doll. Scream. Wake. Coffee. Tell my kids to eat their strawberries faster. Shout at my kids to eat their strawberries faster. Coffee. Emails. Try not to roll eyes. Coffee. Reviews. Roll eyes. Laugh. Good wine. Tell my kids to eat their carrots faster. Shout at my kids to eat their carrots faster. Read. Sleep. Repeat.

7. What are the tools of your trade?

My brain. Outside of that, nothing is really that important.

8. Who is getting it right in your industry?

This is a fairly existential question, as you have to answer the question 'What is the industry?' first. And I don't think anyone can even remotely answer that at the moment. If I had to choose globally, no-one outside of RGA gets it right consistently. Locally, we're too disparate. If we could get the handful of truly world-class people in SA into the same one company, we'd get it right.

9. List a few pain points the industry can improve on.

Respect for clients. And respect for agencies. Clients, we are not in your servitude. And conversely, agencies, our clients are not 'lucky to have us'. We are meant to be partners. Our success is mutually dependent. It's a shame that is so rarely the reality.



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Look at the best work in history and you'll see a close client/agency mutually co-dependent relationship is at the heart of it.

10. What are you working on right now?

Everything.

11. Tell us some of the buzzwords floating around in your industry at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself.

Data. AI. Machine learning. Blockchain. I have one catchphrase. 'Don't be a dick'. The world is full of them. It doesn't need more. Go be a nice person.

12. Where and when do you have your best ideas?

When something shifts my perception of the world. That's why 'travel' is so important. Travel externally to see new places. Travel internally to learn new things. Original ideas are just two or more old ideas brought together in a new combination. The more things you have to combine, the more ideas you'll have. It's not rocket science.

13. What's your secret talent/party trick?

I can snort a shot of tequila with a straw. I prefer straight straws to those bendy ones. Just takes less lung capacity. And yes, it burns. A lot. Like someone ironing your face a lot. I do it once a year.

14. Are you a technophobe or a technophile?

Interesting. For most of my life, I've been a technophile. Deeply and unquestioningly. I blame my father for taking me to *Star Wars* and inciting in me Lucas' life-long belief that technology is essential for positive human progress. Now, I'm not so sure. But I might just be getting old. Read Adam Alter's *Irresistible*. It will open your eyes.

15. What would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

No social media. No unread emails. No answered calls.

16. What advice would you give to newbies hoping to crack into the industry?

Work hard. Be humble. Be smart. Same as any industry really.

Simple as that. Visit his [MyBiz profile](#) for more on Ross, and while he says he "doesn't do social media," here's his [LinkedIn profile](#), plus he's on [Twitter](#). You can also follow King James Digital on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

**Interviewed by [Leigh Andrews](#).*

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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