

# Agency credentials: So much more than swagger

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*Credentials. Bona fides. Street cred. No matter which way you look at it, what the mind conjures up is no single attribute. It's the whole package - the attitude, the appearance, the swagger. So it is with agency credentials, writes Johanna McDowell, CEO of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS).*

It's long been my conviction that creativity alone may win awards, but if it doesn't win sales or new business for the client or brand, it's merely gilding. Now, in an environment that has changed rapidly recently and is presenting us with new challenges, it has never been more important to lead any pitch with return on investment (ROI).

This means that clients need to feel confident that an agency understands their specific business requirements. Agencies do this by revealing their credentials, the foundation on which ROI sits.

As client-agency relationship experts, the IAS has always encouraged clients to make time to evaluate agency credentials during a pitch process. The agency that leads with its list of creative awards must follow swiftly with its street cred.

This includes some history and other information about the agency; a client list; its standing in the industry backed up by press coverage and case studies; and its value for money. Culture, BBEE standing and procurement recommendations are also valuable, and will help the client to determine whether they have a perfect fit or just a creative agency. This is a crucial step for the client.

With the importance of overall credentials in mind at this point in our industry's journey, the IAS took the decision to bring back the IAS Credentials Award, last held in 2016 in collaboration with the DMA Assegai Awards for integrated marketing excellence. In partnering again, both organisations hope to place ROI back at the forefront of campaigns.

According to David Dickens, CEO of The Direct Marketing Association of SA, the Assegai Award entries grew by 30% in 2019, and will this year include entries from international agencies. He notes that this alliance with the IAS means agencies get their credentials out to marketers, and not just their creativity.



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"It's all about giving quality back to the client," he says, adding that having marketers and peers reviewing agency's work is what ensures value." A diverse and robust panel of judges will include two international participants invited by the IAS, Cesar Vacchiano, CEO and President of Scopen International; and Lisa Colantuono, CEO of the International Associate Group AAR US, together with a number of renowned local marketers.

Set for November 2020, the format of the awards will be determined according to safety protocols, and may be held entirely virtually but – importantly – the objective will be real: "It's about the ROI of advertising," says Dickens, "knowing what you're getting back for your buck.

"We're excited to grow the Assegai's with the IAS, as the IAS experience with credentials creates a win-win situation for all stakeholders which is key."

Johanna McDowell and David Dickens share some thoughts around the awards. Listen to the full discussion:

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