

Creative Circle Full Circle focuses on SA's 2023 Cannes Lions performance

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Much of the focus of this year's Creative Circle Full Circle event was on South Africa's performance at the 2023 Cannes Lions, which it was felt had declined since last year.



Creative Circle Full Circle panel: (L to R) Roanna Williams - Creative Circle chairperson, Loyiso Twala - McCann Joburg chief creative officer, Vaughan Croeser - SAB VP of marketing for South Africa, Khensani Nobanda - Nedbank group executive for marketing and corporate affairs, and Ann Nurock - trend spotter (Image by Danette Breitenbach.)

The event took place at the Vodacom Dome, Vodaworld, Midrand late yesterday afternoon and saw the industry in full attendance as they heard from local creatives who served as jury members at the Cannes Lions this year, including the first jury president from the continent, Tseliso Rangaka, FCB Africa's chief creative officer, who headed up the radio and audio jury.

Not SA's best year

It was not South Africa's best year," remarked Ann Nurock, trend spotter who also spoke at the event and hosted the panel discussion.

As Thabang Lehobye, head of Design, FCB Africa, who was a Design jury member says in his talk, "We need to reassess ourselves to see how we can do better."

Roanna Williams, the chairperson of the Creative Circle and a jury member on the Outdoor Lions jury this year points out that South Africa is now ranked 20th on the Cannes Lions rankings. "In 2019 we were ranked 21st, in 2020/21 15th, and last year we moved into 13th position."

Countries similar to ours, such as Brazil, Argentina, and India are up taking home Lions. "So, there is no excuse for us," she says.

While the country did well in the shortlists, our conversion rate has dropped. Williams adds that our entries are also mostly in the traditional categories, and this is also where our conversation rate is highest. "There is a slow movement towards the newer categories."

This is a point that was also made by Rangaka, who spoke about what South Africa needs to do to lift itself back as a leading contender in the radio and audio category.

Traditionally the country's strongest category, this year saw no winners from the shortlist. "The radio and audio category has changed and we need to change as well," he comments.



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Karabo Ledwaba 25 Jul 2023



Not all doom and gloom

But it was not all doom and gloom. A standout this year was Ogilvy SA's *Bread of the Nation* campaign for AB InBev SA's Castle Lager which was shortlisted in the Titanium Lions.

This is a newer category, introduced about three years ago to reward game-changing creativity, and it was Africa's first listing in this category.

A panelist at the event, Vaughan Croeser, the SAB VP of marketing for South Africa remarks that marketers need to demand better work. "Marketers must push for work that creates an impact and pushes the industry forward."

He talks about a balance between ambition and humility. "Humility is for us, the client and our creative partners to admit that we do not know everything and to be open to creativity - and to nurture creativity - whereas ambition demands the best work in the world."

Fellow panelist, and Cannes Lions jury member for Print and Publishing, Loyiso Twala, chief creative officer for McCann Joburg, says clients and agencies need to develop the same reference points to enable them to be on the same page. "If great work means different things to the agency and client then we will never get to winning work."

He adds that work that has won from South Africa previously, has been based on a local insight. "Work grounded in South Africa is what has made us great, and we need to remember what makes us awesome and embrace that."



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How does great work happen?

For great work to happen, Khensani Nobanda, group executive for marketing and corporate affairs, Nedbank and jury member of this year's Cannes Lions Creative Business Transformation category, says there needs to be trust.

"Trust happens when the marketer's board understands the marketing language. Only then can a brand do more creative work. Together with our agencies, we can only shift creativity with the support of our CEO."

She adds that when this does happen, then marketing is also given the budget it requires to fulfill this ambition.

Trust also needs to happen between the brand and its agency. "As clients, we sometimes get in the way of great work, and with all the boxes we need to tick, we end up standing in the line of creativity," she says (to the applause of the audience).

Clients need to be visionary and brave. "A brand's vision should be to do great work. That should be your north star, and if it is not, why are you doing it?" states Nobanda.

Croeser adds to this, saying, "Brands need to be brave. The belief in the cause needs to be bigger than the need for self-preservation." AB In Bev's performance is proof that the brand actually believes and lives this and not just paying lip service to this.

Creativity equals business results

"It has been proven that if you invest in creativity, it will drive your business results," says Nobanda.

Williams agrees. "As an industry, we need to get back to what we are good at - and that is creativity. The bottom line is ruining our business, yet creativity adds to the bottom line."

She adds that the industry does not do advertising. "No one likes advertising, but that's not what we do. We find solutions to problems using creativity and thinking that is out of the box. And that is what we need to communicate to the world to get their respect."



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Lean into it

While the conversation took a tough stance on the industry's performance this year, it is worth remembering that this year 51 countries entered Cannes, with 26,972 entries, of which 96.4% won nothing, with only 3.6% won a bronze, silver or gold Lion.

Also on a positive note, this year also saw the highest number of jury members and off-site shortlist jury members from Africa ever, with five off-site judges and 11 onsite judges.

"We are dodging potholes to drive to work and back, and scheduling around load shedding, and it has affected us, but we need to lean into that, we are resilient," says Williams.

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Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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