

with... David Alves

This week, we find out what's really going on behind the selfie with David Alves, Head of Digital at Net#work BBDO...



Selfie Level: Grumpy Cat Dave

1. Where do you live, work and play?

Alves:

Live: Joburg.

Work: At an established advertising firm in Joburg.

Play: Internationally, as much as I can. But I like to keep it local.

2. What's your claim to fame?

Alves: Tough one. Don't really have one. Fame ain't really my bag, but if I had to answer, it would have to be having an all-year-tan, being Portuguese and all.

3. Describe your career so far.

Alves: Failed entrepreneur twice over. Escorted myself into the advertising world without anyone noticing and have been making ads, doing digital and drinking good quality coffee ever since.

4. Tell us a few of your favourite things.

Alves: Whisky. Surfing. Traveling. Watches. I unfortunately have an affection for very expensive things. It comes with the territory, I suppose. I'm a capitalist.

5. What do you love about your industry?

Alves: I feel our industry - digital advertising - has still got a long way to go, which is extremely exciting because being a part of 'deepest, darkest Africa', we have the potential to delight and surprise the rest of the world by doing things that are not only innovative, but are contextually relevant to our market. Everyone is looking at Africa as the next big innovation hub and they look to us, as marketers, to lend a guiding light into culture, infrastructure and behaviour. No one markets to Africans like Africans do. There is so much exciting energy in this country that has gone untapped for too long.

6. What are a few pain points your industry can improve on?

Alves: Crisis, where do I even start? Just kidding. It's a tough thing to be blatantly criticising of my industry because I love

it so much. I think like any industry, we all have pet-hate-struggles and aspects of the what happens on a day-to-day basis to be better, but if there was one thing I would like to see an improvement on is an open culture of knowledge sharing. I feel as though the advertising and digital industry can never truly progress unless knowledge is shared beyond the walls of one's own agency. I really enjoy sharing what I have learnt in my career with anyone willing to listen to me drivel on, but being able to share knowledge is a gift and it should be cultivated more often.

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

Alves: I would hesitate to say that every day is far from average, but typically I come into the office and settle at my desk with full-cream yoghurt, blueberries and coffee. I never start my day with email. Email is the life-sapping cousin of the internet. It has the ability to draw you in and keep you there until you're reminded of a meeting. So, instead I have three or four informal chats with our creatives and suits to touch base on where projects are. I run through daily agenda, written on our status board, with my team and thereafter, most of my day is spent sitting in meetings with people much smarter and more capable than I, which I love. Only then do I look at email. Begrudgingly.

8. What are the tools of your trade?

Alves: Composure. Solution-orientated creativity on tap. And the web. The last part is where the talent lies. Being able to sift through the mucus that is the internet and plug your brain into the thought leadership, examples and knowledge that counts the most. Staying a breast of trends and knowing where the industry might (read: will) go for each and every one of your clients is 50% of the job.

9. Who is getting it right in your industry?

Alves: We are! Can I say that? No. Okay, fine. Objectively, there is so much great work happening at the moment and a lot of it is not coming from the big agencies. The slick and hipster-hating crew over at Flint+Tinder are doing some incredible things. The geniuses over at iLogic have more brain power, Eskom should be hiring them to solve our load shedding issues. Previously specialised agencies such as Native are starting to bloom into TTL mavens, which is the way everyone needs to be going any way. I hear some Analytics mastery is happening at Ogilvy, headed up by Tiaan de Kock. The advertising agency industry is shifting and moving all the time and agencies are staying agile and responding to the movements. Long may it continue.

10. What are you working on right now?

Alves: If I told you, I'd have to tweet you. Kidding. I am happily building my very own track bike from a Buell XB12 Long. It'll be a beast when it's done.

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

Alves: Swearwords don't count, do they? Last year we surveyed our agency for behavioural changes and studies and found that these are the utterances from the study:

- **Leading buzzword: Revert - 27.59%**
- **Comfy second place: Integrate - 24.14%**
- **And a few others which I unfortunately couldn't share in this interview due to expletives.**

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

Alves: I hate saying that inspiration strikes at odd times for me, but it really does. I could be at dinner with friends, on the couch at home or lying in bed reading. The consistent theme here is relaxation and comfort. I'm usually

quite pragmatic when it comes to delivering solutions on a day-to-day basis, but truly creative ideas tend to come from a special place not on Google Maps.

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

Alves: I can tie a cherry stick in a knot with my tongue. Which apparently means utter kak.

14. Are you a technophobe or a technophile?

Alves: Awks. FaceTime with Mac FTW.

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

Alves: Depends through which App you're scrolling through. Photos: A holiday in Bali. WhatsApp: Conversations with friends and Groups messages that will never see the light of day. Generally: Social and Productivity Apps and basically anything that makes life easier to handle while waiting in queues or for friends to arrive for a beer.

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

Alves: That's tough. I've been lucky enough to have been a part of a developmental programme designed to give 18-25 year olds a no-cost opportunity to undertake a three-month digital skills training programme. The course is called Digify ZA, run by the team at Livity Africa. These students are sharp, motivated and brilliant. In essence, the programme is design to kick start their understanding of the industry and prepare them for the trenches, but hard and soft skills are two very different animals and the soft skills needed to navigate this industry can only be cultivated through experience. Oh, right, advice... I guess I would say, commit and associate yourself with work you believe in. Beyond that, identify those industry leaders you want to learn from and then do whatever it takes to work with, close to, underneath and beside them.

17. Plug your contact details, punt yourself - list all the places people can find you/your work - Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Youtube, Instagram, Pinterest...

Alves: Don't have too many of those, but you're welcome to grab me here:

[Twitter](#)

[Blog](#)

[Memeburn](#)

<https://zerply.com/DavidAlves>

[Click here](#) for more from Alves.

**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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