

Exclusive insights from 2015's Annual AdFocus Award judges

 By Leigh Andrews

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Debate and difficulty in choosing a clear winner in some of this year's Annual AdFocus Awards categories is testament to a well-developed marketing and communications industry.

Finalists for the *Financial Mail's* 2015 Annual AdFocus Awards were announced on Friday, 9 October, with nominees announced across categories such as small, medium and large advertising agency, as well as specialist and digital agency, branding and design, media agency, African agency network of the year, partnership of the year and student of the year.

With so many categories, and so many entrants in each category, judging was by no means easy.

I caught up with a few of this year's judges to find out more about the judging process and what exactly they were looking for from entries...



Masekwameng at last year's Awards

Festus Masekwameng is this year's head judge. He's managing partner of MKT Media and former chairman of the Loerie Awards. He explains that judging criteria across the board involved four different categories that have equal weighting. The first of these is business growth in terms of accounts won or new organic opportunities from existing clients. This is important as it demonstrates the traction of the agency and the trust from new clients. The next aspect is longevity of the relationship with clients, to make sure they don't just award a "flash in the pan that's here today gone tomorrow." Industry recognition in terms of awards and leadership in the industry is also factored in, to show that the relevant entrants enjoy the respect - and envy - of their peers.

Developmental, CSI and BEE credentials are the final aspect considered, important as this demonstrates patriotism and commitment to enhancing the local industry and creating new opportunities for others, or just outright making a difference in the lives of South Africans.

Result auditing limits the possibility of scandals

Masekwameng adds that the panel is made up of industry experts across the board, including from client's side, and

everything is overseen and audited by "the fierce suits from Deloitte so there'll be no scandals".

Masekwameng found the calibre of entries this year amazing, with lots of close calls amongst potential winners, and some let down by a slight oversight in terms of the rules or T&Cs. New challengers also popped up in some categories where they expected obvious winners too, so hold onto your hats!

Thulani Sibeko, Managing executive, group marketing, communications and corporate affairs at Nedbank adds that as in the past, the judging process was fun and stimulating. 'Fun' because of the diversity of characters involved and 'stimulating' due to the quality of work assessed, from different types of agencies and a wide range of projects. For most categories, he found the volume and quality of work to be of a very high standard. While that's a good thing, it sometimes made it hard to separate the leader of the pack. Sibeko calls this "testament to a well-developed marketing and communications industry."

That's especially fitting as the editorial theme of this year's Annual AdFocus publication is "the growing importance of integration and collaboration in advertising and communications."

So winners announced on the night will be those that fulfilled most of the above criteria well. So while some agencies enjoyed good business growth, if they were lax when it came to giving back by way of CSI, they didn't win. The same was true of those that have won other creative awards but cannot, unfortunately, demonstrate impressive growth. Still, Masekwameng says "those are the extremes, as most are really trying to create that balance to varying successes."

Student work that stands on its own

Nic Kostouros, Creative Group Head of Promise Group, says the judging process involved fair debates and discussions on each of the entries, looking at each as an individual. He points out: "It was important for us to not look at the work for what it is now, but rather for what it could be in years to come." So it wasn't merely about answering the question of "what work appeals to me", but rather looking at what work feels fresh and as a signature to the entrant.

Kostouros agreed that the calibre of entries across the board was good, with a few stand outs that had the entire room excited. "It's not every day you envy a portfolio some seven years younger than yours," he adds. He kept an eye out for clear confidence in a specific style of work or way of thinking that was fresh and honest, because at the early stage of one's career, it's important to create work that's not merely an imitation of what others out in the big bad world feel is worthy.

Wise words indeed.

The awards ceremony will take place on 25 November at RoomFive in Rivonia. [Click here](#) for more and keep an eye out for opinion from this year's five African agency nominees as well as this year's three nominees for top student of the year and specialist jurors from their judging panel.

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