

# Kingdom Agency

 By Jessica Tennant

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Kingdom is the new agency on the block, with a heart for positive messaging and making a difference. As such, the insight, strategy and creative agency, founded by friends Donna Mathews and Herman Wallis, applies a triple-win philosophy, whereby the message must be good for the brand (profit), the audience (people) and everyone (planet). This ethos is built into their unique model and efficient way of doing business, without offices and adopting a results-only work environment (ROWE) strategy, saving costs and believing that flexibility and productivity go hand in hand.



## Remote control

Donna Mathews, Kingdom Agency 10 Apr 2017



Here, Mathews and Wallis tell us their startup story...

### ▣ *What sparked the idea to start Kingdom?*

**Mathews:** Herman and I are friends, and we had both left our previous companies (me, from a global agency and him, a big corporate) at the same time. We both felt called to start an advertising agency with a difference, so we got together and started working on what it would look like.

**Wallis:** Having reached a point in my career where I realised the difference between working hard and making a difference, I really felt the need to invest my time and effort into work that really matters, output that makes a positive impact in the lives of the people we touch and contributes responsibly through the channels we as marketers use to reach our consumers.

### ▣ *How did you come up with the name?*

**Mathews:** The name is particularly significant to us as the agency has been built on strong spiritual beliefs and principles. We wanted to start something that makes a positive difference in the world. I was drawing crowns and playing with the idea of royalty/king and Herman came back with Kingdom, and so the name [Kingdom Agency](#) was born.

**Wallis:** Zero time was spent mulling over Kingdom. It came to me as I was sitting on the beach in Blouberg reminiscing, and I knew it was the right name for what we needed to do.

### ▣ *Describe the model.*

**Mathews:** It's not super complex or even that unique, it's just a simple; an easy and cost-efficient model for both us and an agency, as well as our clients. We have a core team who manage projects, strategy and creative direction, and then we build custom teams around projects, with top people we have come across in the last 18 years of being in the business.

**Wallis:** The model was really developed to avoid several frustrations we had to adhere to in the past, which we didn't feel contributes to the best solution for an agency nor its clients. This posed the question: 'How can we be the most efficient,



Donna Mathews

and have the most dedicated and committed people work on projects that excites them?' The answer: Use specialists who get to choose the projects they want to work on, allow them the freedom and flexibility to do work from wherever they want to, and allow them to work in a manner that gets them to produce the best work.

❏ ***Explain your 'triple-win' philosophy and the power of positive messaging.***

**Mathews:** I think we all know the upside and downside of the advertising industry, which has changed so significantly over the past 30 years. There is a real sense of ethical responsibility that comes with having a (brand) voice, which I feel we often don't realise we yield. When you say something to someone based on an insight you have about that person and their needs, you shouldn't just say anything to make them buy the brand, especially if that thing impacts them negatively or plays into insecurities.

Firstly, if a business or brand does not benefit society, I do not feel it should exist (I can be a bit radical – I know – but the world needs more radical!) and secondly, if the brand message is not leaving the people who read it feeling inspired or better about themselves or the world around them, then we should not be putting it out there. In an ideal world, every message or advert should be something I am comfortable for my 12-year-old daughter to see and be better for it. We have a responsibility towards the people or 'eyeballs' as the industry likes to call it – these eyeballs are attached to a human with an influential mind. There is currently a lot of hype around the ethics in our business, especially in the tech/digital marketing/social media space, so it's important as an industry that we're real about this.

❏ ***Why are you an advocate of the 'results-only work environment' strategy?***

**Mathews:** I think technology has allowed us to outlive the '9-5' mentality 10+ years ago! Productivity has nothing to do with having an 'employee's' bum in a seat and this mindset is outdated. I believe if you have a team of self-motivated people with high integrity, you don't need to police anyone, and people are responsible for what they are meant to do. Obviously, there are core working hours that clients work and business runs, however there is flexibility within that – if it's going to make you happy to go for a run or a surf in the day, then do it. If you get a brainwave at midnight and that works for you, then go for it. I would much rather have inspired, happy people involved in projects as this increases productivity. I also don't see people as employees. Everything in life is an exchange, and there should be mutual respect in that exchange.

❏ ***How is this a 'triple-win' for the business/employee, the client and the environment?***

**Mathews:** It's really asking how we can make the people-planet-profit thing work for both our business and our clients' businesses. Our model, choice of clients and positive messaging stance is how we do it as a business. For our clients, we sum it up like this: good message for the brand (business/profit), good message for the audience (people) and good message for everyone (greater good/planet/sustainability).

❏ ***Congrats on being shortlisted as a finalist in the 2017 Sage Small Business Awards with CapeTalk. Why are you excited about this? What does this mean to you and for the agency?***

**Wallis:** As a small business owner, it's always great to be recognised for doing great work. We are so grateful for having been a finalist and it has inspired us to do even more.

❏ ***What work are you particularly proud of and why?***

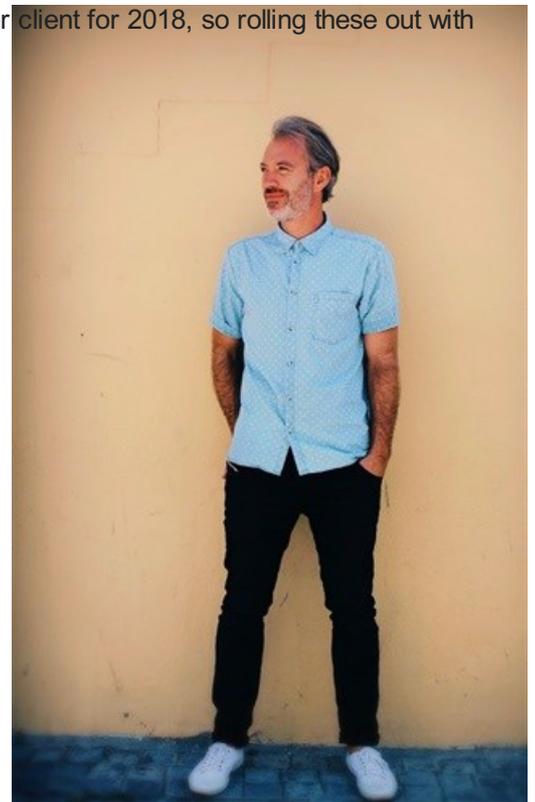
**Mathews:** I love the Seeff repositioning we worked on last year with the 'Home is Our Story' campaign. We shifted the brand strategically from being agent-focused to being customer-focused – literally turning the lens around and looking at what a home, not just a house, really means to people. I'm also super excited about a new campaign we have just launched for Hi-Tec, called Live SuperNatural. It's such a fresh campaign, moving the brand into a younger space and inspiring people to get outside and live life connected to nature and their mates' IRL, not just through a screen.

**Wallis:** Winning the Seeff client in a three-way pitch against some of South Africa's biggest and best agencies will always be one we are extremely proud of. It underlined that we can honestly compete with the best in the business and produce work of a quality and standard second to none.

❏ ***What's next?***

**Mathews:** We are already busy with some exciting campaigns for our bigger client for 2018, so rolling these out with excellence is number one. We also worked on some lovely startups this past year and enjoy helping new businesses get out of the starting blocks, so we hope to help a few more. For me, personally, more than anything, I would just like to do great work that is inspiring with good messaging that helps our clients' businesses grow in a sustainable manner.

**Wallis:** Growing our portfolio of clients and ensuring we continue to produce quality work will allow us to continue to create positive messaging and impacting more consumers in ways that truly matter.



Herman Wallis

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