

Gutsy ad agency climbs the ranks by changing the rules

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Boomtown is raking in the awards - and getting noticed by its peers - despite eschewing the limelight

It is one of the longest-surviving brand agencies in the country and boasts an original founding member as its chairman, yet the company is shaking up the advertising world with its unconventional approach and in the process raking in the awards and racking up the blue-chip clients.

This, says Johannesburg MD Andre Hübner, has come through pursuing a strategy focused on unique and tangible results for clients, but also driven by the unconventional approach of "going tribal" - delving into the psyche of what drives the modern consumer and moving beyond tired, conventional marketing strategies.

The approach appears to be working, as, according to the recently-published 2013 Creative Circle Agency Ranking Tables, Boomtown has moved up the ranks to be placed fourth nationally in the Small Individual Agency category.

Last year saw Boomtown increase its staff compliment by 20% and at the same time experience national revenue growth of 25% as it received the accounts of blue-chip clients such as Barloworld, SAB, Shatterprufe and Unilever.

Results driven

Success, says Hübner, is not measured in awards, but in delivering tangible results which relate to value-for-money and a high return on investment for clients. Some of the recent successful Boomtown campaigns have delivered astounding results, such as:

- A 112% sales increase for a maize meal brand;
- A 200% return on investment for a consumer dessert brand; and
- The placing of doctors into Africa as a direct result of an award-winning direct marketing campaign for African Health Placements.

Its work has, in turn, seen Boomtown lauded. Accolades garnered during 2013 alone include a coveted Epica Gold at the International Creative Awards ceremony- one of just three South African agencies to win a gold award. Other awards won by the agency last year also include a Clio Healthcare Silver; a Clio Silver; a nomination as a Cannes Finalist; two Loeries Bronze; and an Assegai Gold, Silver and Bronze award.

With its national reach and staff in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, Hübner says the company's strategy is on focussing on a client's journey of growth and delivering tangible results, rather than flashy campaigns which often lack substance.

The journey of growth, he says, is leading the thinking on brands and "digging deeper" with unique solutions to market a client's business.

Brands with heart

The company is also dedicating itself to creating "brands with heart", says Boomtown Creative Director, Andrew Mackenzie.

"Using our creative expertise to highlight important causes and draw attention to non-profit organisations is something which

we find immensely rewarding," says Mackenzie.

One such campaign involved recruiting doctors for client Africa Health Placements, which does work in Sub-Saharan Africa. Combining two traditional mediums (direct mail and radio) to create the world's first stethoscope radio advertisement, the campaign earned Boomtown its Epica Gold.

Boomtown's pro-bono work is also drawing global attention, such as its campaign for non-profit welfare organisation Hannah's Arms which has been lauded by TrendHunter, a leading global website aimed at uncovering breakthrough ideas in the industry [see the website's comment and the adverts here: <http://www.trendhunter.com/trends/hannahs-arms>]. The campaign is one of 12 corporate social investment projects which the company is presently involved with.

Being flexible

According to Glen Meier, Boomtown Coastal MD, today's marketing environment "calls for agencies that are flexible enough to adapt to highly dynamic market conditions". While many other agencies specialise in one area, Boomtown has diversified, offering a holistic service through specialist teams.

"Our strength is our ability to do just that - working smarter and adapting operational strategies according to clients' needs," says Meier. Growing brands, increasing sales and strengthening customer relationships will continue to be the core focus for each Boomtown client.

"We have consistently been punching above our weight category and have no intention of slowing down," says Meier. "Our national clients are finding that we offer the value for money and loyalty of smaller agencies, but that we have the creative concepts and production values which are superior to some of the big hitters in the industry. It's a great combination."

Going tribal

Another unique direction taken by the company is to "go tribal", according to Business Development Director, Jane Stevenson. The concept of the tribal marketing ideology is to dig deep into what drives consumers, moving "beyond focussing on repeat purchasing behaviour, to relationships based on bonds of loyalty and emotion".

"Traditional market segments ignore the importance of social identity," says Stevenson. "Tribal market is a dynamic shift from traditional market segmentation to in-depth customer psychographics with intricate social insights. It's the new way of focusing marketing on motivating brand loyalty and purchase behaviour using social identity."

The results speak for themselves. Boomtown is now eyeing the big industry players as its competition, while its gutsy and edgy attitude is getting it noticed.

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