

Fostering an attitude of disruption

By  Jessica Tennant

17 Dec 2019

Following the recent #TBWAAfricaConference, I interviewed Graham Cruikshanks, director for Africa operations at TBWA\ Johannesburg on his involvement in the event.

The #TBWAAfricaConference, he said, has the objective of re-emphasising TBWA\'s core disruption principles and the theme of this year's event is fostering an "attitude of disruption", which he believes is necessary to be competitive and to differentiate yourself from other businesses. Here, he tells us more about what he means by this and what he believes is required for businesses to succeed in African markets...

■ ***Comment on your involvement in the #TBWAAfricaConference this year.***

As TBWA\ director for Africa Operations, I oversaw all aspects of the #TBWAAfricaConference and we have an excellent team that helped to deliver everything from strategic planning, speaker selection, logistics and amplification.

We place significant emphasis on relevance – ensuring that the theme and subsequent content impacts network agency business in a tangible way. We need to be in-tune with our changing industry and specific market dynamics. The content is specifically designed with these factors in mind, but also remaining focused on the broader, global TBWA\ objectives.

■ ***What were some of the stand-out insights shared on the day?***

This year, a key objective was re-emphasising TBWA\'s core disruption principles, with a prevailing theme of fostering an "attitude of disruption". This attitude defines who we are as TBWA\ and is necessary to be competitive and to differentiate ourselves. An attitude of disruption is waking every day up and applying disruptive thinking, it's challenging conventions and questioning the work we do. I firmly believe disruption helps to add an unfair advantage to the client businesses that we work with. It allows us to think of unique and break-through solutions, position and structure businesses to adapt, evolve and become more relevant.



Graham Cruikshanks, director for Africa operations at TBWA\ Johannesburg.



TBWA\ Africa kicks its focus on disruption up a notch

27 Oct 2016



■ ***You said in a press release that you plan to maintain conference momentum into 2020 and that affiliates are building volumes by providing new services in each market while exploring cross-border opportunities. Can you elaborate on this?***

The conference generates a lot of energy and we work hard to keep the momentum up! We're in regular contact with our affiliates and have ongoing conversations to constantly challenge our agencies around disruptive thinking, creativity and innovation.



TBWA 6 Nov 2019



An attitude of disruption is not only a focus on client business. It is also important that we focus that thinking on our own businesses. Many of our Africa partners have their own content facilities and are expanding their offering through platform development and increased capabilities in data and technology.

Our Backslash Africa insights platform is fuelled by about 50 insight-spotters across the continent. They feed our content hub, through a highly active and engaged WhatsApp forum, which then translates this input into weekly, video culture reports. These are then published and shared to the African and global collective, as well as to our clients.



TBWA Africa Conference kicks off, telling African stories

TBWA 28 Nov 2017



■ ***What would you say in your opinion is required for businesses to succeed in African markets?***

Firstly, you must have a long-term strategy. Don't have a preset expectation of how to do things or assume that a plug and play model will always work. Business on the continent happens differently. Be prepared to adapt, mould and develop your business. Be open-minded about how your business model works, know the core components, but work out how you deliver these in a dynamic or challenging environment.

Another key factor is building strong local partnerships. Local partnerships assist in navigating local business nuance, providing general insight, as well as helping with compliance and governance understanding, which is a major factor across African markets. It's also critical to have strong PR and stakeholder management in place so that you're "in the know" and prepared. Often businesses don't invest enough in this area. Government liaison is vital, and businesses need to be constantly engaged with key stakeholders within their industries so they know how legislation is changing or being interpreted, so they can navigate and manage these circumstances.

■ ***What would you say are some of the common mistakes that brands make when trying to get into these markets?***

They don't do enough homework. It's critical to research and analyse a market so that you have a very clear understanding of its dynamics. Not knowing enough about an environment, its legislation, its consumers is a deal-breaker. Capability is also an issue, it's hard work to keep service levels high, to keep quality control strong, so having the ability to recruit, build capability and retain staff is also a key priority.

■ ***What do you mean when you say that many economies in Africa remain extraction-based, and what does this mean for these businesses?***

Most of the domestic economies in Africa are highly dependent on extraction-based industries – mining, oil and other minerals. This means that when global commodity prices fall, these economies face massive challenges. Countries that have been able to diversify, providing more service-oriented industries have proved to be more resilient.

■ ***You mentioned that there's no 'one size fits all' approach to advertising across the continent. But what value can a local agency bring in this regard?***

There's no such thing as a one size fits all approach for advertising specifically on our continent. Local agency partners provide local insights, dynamics and understanding. They are able to bring an understanding of what is influencing local culture and behaviour and assist in translating how that is represented in work. Investing in a local agency brings enormous

value.



#TBWAAfricaConference2019: Be the chosen one

Danette Breitenbach 5 Nov 2019



▣ **Where does disruption come in?**

Disruption is a bespoke TBWA methodology that helps us identify new areas for brands to grow. We believe that it's incredibly valuable for African businesses. Because businesses deal with unique challenges, they need disruptive thinking to navigate complex market dynamics and find locally appropriate solutions. Global approaches are not always applicable if this is the case you need disruptive ideas to find the right answers for your business.

▣ **Do you believe disruption has the power to affect social change and business in Africa? And if yes, how?**

The African continent faces huge socio-economic challenges which hamper economic growth. Many feel that entrepreneurialism can provide the necessary impetus to allow for countries to rise above macro issues and be the catalyst to much-needed development. It is important, therefore, that TBWA\ remains in-step with such organisations and by demonstrating an ability for disruptive, creative thinking we signal a relevance for 21st-century African businesses.

Disruption certainly has the ability to affect social change. It's easier for African businesses to evolve because we don't have as many legacy issues and our business thinking isn't as rigid or regimented as in other parts of the world. I believe the continent can adapt quickly when the opportunity arises. The mobile/micro-finance industry is a superb example of finding new ways to make things work, by forgetting about regular banking and tech as we know it. This is a great case study of how to really energise economies.

▣ **What do you think agencies/business need(s) to do in order to get this right?**

Businesses need to keep their ear to the ground, be immersed in what is around them and become true citizens of their own culture. They must remain true to who they are, but be realistic about where they are and be prepared to adapt to local circumstances, leveraging modern culture to remain relevant and connected.

For more, follow #TBWAAfricaConference on social media and Graham Cruikshanks [@lamshanks](#) or [@TBWAHunts](#) on Twitter.



TBWA\ signals Africa growth plans with new appointment

15 Apr 2013



ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

Jess is Senior Editor: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com. She is also a contributing writer. marketingnews@bizcommunity.com

- ▣ Have You Heard's in_Broadcasting launches conference series - 23 Nov 2021
- ▣ Kantar study looks at changing media consumption - 22 Nov 2021
- ▣ #Loeries2021: Grand Prix winner Joe Public United's 'Unity Laces' for Converse - 19 Nov 2021
- ▣ #Loeries2021: Grand Prix winner Havas Creative Middle East's 'Liquid Billboard' for Adidas - 18 Nov 2021
- ▣ Carl Willoughby comments on TBWA and Toasted Samish's Pendering Umpetha win - 16 Nov 2021

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>