

How African storytelling can win awards, international recognition

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

10 Jul 2015

Africa's known for its storytelling tradition, but is not usually awarded for it beyond South Africa - the fact that Kenya has just won its first ever Cannes Lions trophy is proof of this. Graham Cruikshanks, TBWA's Director of Africa Operations, explains...

There's no denying that the continent has a rich history of storytelling. As pulling together emotive threads and drawing together a story that really resonates is the basis of today's advertising industry, you'd think Africa thus stands in good stead at the global advertising award shows. Sadly, that's not the case. While [South Africa usually does fairly well](#), the rest of the continent isn't nearly as well recognised.



That's the word from Cruikshanks, who speaks about Kenya's first ever Cannes Lions win and what that means for the continent as a whole.

"A Cannes win for the continent is long overdue and shows a maturing creative industry".

The work itself is definitely sombre and sobering - [click here](#) if you've not seen it yet. But that's not to say all African stories are tragic or sad. Cruikshanks says: "We definitely need to stand up against things we see are wrong." But we have other stories to tell, too. Our opportunity is to celebrate the positive ones, and laugh at ourselves where we can and certainly shock if necessary. Whatever the message, we have to find our own African voice to tell that African story in a creative way."

Wondering how exactly to get this right?

Keep it African, keep it authentic



Graham Cruikshanks

The answer lies in a challenge Cruikshanks sets for any local agency: Ask yourself if the ad could have run elsewhere in the world, like in the US or in Brazil etc. If the answer is 'Yes', then perhaps it's not truly African and there might be a missed opportunity to find its unique Africanness."

Similarly, Cruikshanks says not to merely emulate the winning work from the rest of the world. It won't come across as authentic, it won't be African, and so, is unlikely to truly stand out.

Instead, take [Creative Y&R Kenya's win](#) as inspiration for all and as a target for agencies to

aim for. See it as a shot in the arm for all of us in the creative industries. It's not outside our grasp, keep striving for creative excellence.

"We simply need to look inwards to our own African insights. Let's get African brands to reflect the stories behind them. Tell the story authentically and let's open the world's eyes to the African truth," advises Cruikshanks.

Wise words.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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