

And the knee bone's connected to the ankle bone

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

24 Jun 2016

What makes a successful campaign might be an age-old question in the advertising world, but it is as relevant today as it is was a decade ago. Recently after being asked the question, and not having a clear answer, Ben Wagner, Head of Native VML, got to grips with what makes up a successful campaign using the analogy of the human body.

Kicking off the presentation at Native VML's offices in Sandton, Gauteng, Wagner admitted to a fascination with classical anatomy drawings from when he was a young child. "This fascination increased with age as I got to appreciate the field and what all goes into it - muscles, bones etc. – and that for a human body to produce a successful body all of these have to come together."

This, he says, is the inspiration behind his anatomy of a successful campaign. And it all starts with the heart.

"The heart is our relationship with our clients and their relationship with us and it is the most important part. For a strong heart there has to be a true and healthy partnership between agency and client, that is a commitment to each other."

Apart from this, for the heart to function optimally, there also has to exist a mutual obsession for great work. "Work is the ultimate focus in the heart metaphor. At the same time both client and agency have to be impeccable with their word, in other words, do what they say they are going to do." Linked to this is guarding against individual complexities eroding great work and knowing when to get out of the way - and that applies to both agency and client, he says. "The last point is to trust... but there is so much more in the heart analogy as it feels what eyes do not see and the mind does not understand."

To demonstrate his heart analogue, Wagner showed the work that this year won Native VML its first ever Cannes Gold Lion in the Print and Publishing (Public Health & Safety) category. Native VML partnered with People Against Suffering Oppression and Poverty (Passap), a South African non-profit that advocates for equality, justice and human rights for all in a [print and poster campaign](#), "Being a Muslim does not make someone a terrorist".



Image via NATIVEVML

Next is the brain, which governs purpose. “The brain is divided into two hemispheres, left and right, one of reason and one of creativity, but both have to work together if we are to produce purpose-driven work that lives in peoples’ lives.”

The time of interruption is over, and you have to lead with purpose today if you are to offer or add value. However, he says, even this is not good enough. “Today you must have shared value.”

The spine is the strategic framework off which you build your ideas. “It includes your business strategy, brand strategy and communications strategy. Keep in mind your spine is connected to your brain.”

The ears and eyes come next. “Ears are for listening. As marketers we sometimes fail to hear what consumers are saying and forget what the customer wants. The eyes are for interpreting data and shifting through data and pulling out the smart data to do meaningful work. It is about marketing to the right 'Jane' in the right moment and not a generic stereotype.”

The nose represents intuition. “There are times when we know an idea will work, but we do not know why and we have no research, but we know. This also takes us back to the trust between the client and agency.”

Producing content with context is the mouth. “People are blocking ads or turning off or tuning out, so this is the most important thing we do. We cannot interrupt the content people are interested in; we have to become the content people are interested in.”

Wagner used the example of the [Jameson Indie Channel](#) that was created to reframe the brand in local content. The channel not only became a vital enabler of creativity in South Africa, enabling young creatives, but it also increased sales by 23%.

[Native VML Jameson Indie Channel](#)

The arms are using the correct tools and focusing on craft. “Craft can make work stand out in the eyes of the consumer. We should not be obsessed with our technology as this can trip us up and distract us, and lead to us losing the idea.”

The legs are how we move an idea to get it into the spaces and places. “Sometimes a piece of work does not require much as it moves itself, such as the Love Has No Labels campaign that went viral and had 22 million views.”

Lastly, from time to time we need to be brave, he says. “And to be brave, we need some balls.”

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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