

Exclusive: How Idea Engineers built a sustainable business for 21 years

 By [Janice Spark](#)

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Communications Agency, Idea Engineers, celebrates its 21st anniversary this year.



Image supplied. Communications agency, Idea Engineers, celebrates its 21st anniversary this year co-founder, Janice Spark, reflects on 5 reasons for the company's longevity

In Internet terms, 21 years feels like centuries - it's time enough for business empires to rise and fall and for new technologies to turn industries on their heads multiple times over.

So how do you build a business that lasts in such a volatile and fast-moving environment? Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, offers one of the keys to longevity: "The secret...is to focus on the things that don't change in your business."

We might not have articulated it as brilliantly as he does, but that principle is how we've managed to survive and grow in an always-changing industry.

Tactics and tools evolve, but the principles of robust marketing, communications, brand and advertising remain constant. It's all about delivering campaigns and executions that help our clients tell their stories, share their purpose and build their brands.

How we did it

Here are some of the ways we've tried to ensure the sustainability of our business over the years:

1. Assembling a powerhouse of talent

Human creativity, innovations, interpersonal relationships and business insight are the keys to running a successful communications agency. To get that right, you need great people. From our earlier years, we not only focused on finding great freelance and full-time professionals but also on identifying and nurturing young talent. Many of our team members have been with us from the start, which has helped us retain institutional memory and ensure consistency.

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2. Keeping up with industry trends, technologies, and best practices

When we founded Idea Engineers in 2002, people carried cell phones rather than smartphones, Yahoo! was the leading search engine, and social media had yet to be invented. It was intoxicating to work with clients who were pioneering digital marketing, others among the first business-to-business internet service providers, and one that embraced reality TV at a time when it was still new. But it also meant working hard to stay ahead of industry trends, from our early efforts at influencer marketing with BlackBerry's brand ambassadors to creating integrated, award-winning social and PR campaigns for Sage, the cloud accounting software company. We also blazed a trail by launching Facebook's brand and first office in Africa.

3. Understanding clients' business

From our earliest years, one of the ways we've succeeded is by immersing ourselves in our clients' business. Launching multinationals into South Africa and helping startups to get attention became part of our speciality. Our approach focuses on mapping branding and marketing executions to each client's business objectives and vision - PR, advertising and digital closely aligned to business outcomes and metrics.

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4. Building relationships for the long term

We have spent over 21 years in partnership, collaboration and shared success with many of our clients and partners, with some being part of our journey since the beginning. We had relationships that span five, 10 and more years with many brands and business partners. In the ever-changing landscape of marketing advertising, where relationships are often fleeting, we take pride in the enduring bonds we've forged. We focus on keeping each relationship fresh by creating innovative campaigns and pushing creative boundaries - unlocking the power of trust, loyalty, and shared growth.

“ Our industry has never stopped changing, and we face some of the most challenging and exciting disruptions we've encountered yet ”

5. Centring on a purpose

We've always gravitated towards work that includes an element of purpose - we love working with brands that have a clear vision for how they want to change the world. We believe in driving profit and purpose; a factor that helps to ensure sustainability through times of boom and bust alike. It's this alignment of growth and purpose that is at the core of many of our most long-lasting business relationships.

Staying focused on the fundamentals

Our industry has never stopped changing, and we face some of the most challenging and exciting disruptions we've encountered yet. Competition for new accounts is fierce, budgets are tight, and the next wave of technology-driven change is here in the form of generative artificial intelligence (AI). We're continuously needing to upskill in new ways of working.

On the upside, the growing focus on factors like diversity and inclusion as well as Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) space plays to our strengths. What won't change for us is our focus on growing with our clients and offering them a single-stop solution for their marketing needs. Here's to another 21 years of showing that commercially successful work can be good for the world as well.

ABOUT JANICE SPARK

Janice Spark is a managing partner at advertising and PR agency Idea Engineers (Facebook: @ideaengineerssa). Spark, a founding member of Idea Engineers, has directed the marketing efforts of leading global organisations for over 20 years. Contact Janice via tel +27 (0)11 803 0030, email janice@ideaengineers.co.za and follow her on Twitter at @janicespark.

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