

# Oliver's U-Studio grows through effective creative

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Oliver's pioneering in-house agency model is winning, both in growth and awards, according to Unilever's largest digital agency, U-Studio.



As consumers have shifted online in the past two years, Oliver's U-Studio has seen a quadruple growth with their pioneering in-house model for Unilever, with some of the company's brands seeing a recorded growth of as much as 120%.

U-Studio has won eleven awards for the Unilever campaigns in the past couple of months including: The New Generation Awards, Assegai Awards and MMA's.

"The convergence of data, creativity and purpose-led brands have led them to be best-in-class for effective marketing campaigns," says Theo Spencer, Managing Partner for U-Studio Africa. "We've seen exponential growth in South Africa both as an agency and for the Unilever brands, which can be attributed to our bespoke technology, talent and teamwork as well as being inside the company."

"The inside understanding of the business needs and being exposed to the business challenges first-hand is how we are able to drive solutions to solve the business needs and truly partner with the brands," he explains. "It's every agency's dream to test and learn with brand teams to ensure that the creative idea is optimum but because we're in a position to form part of the brands DNA, we've seen our campaigns not only being effective in delivering against what we set-out to achieve but they're also winning awards."

Spencer attributes this growth to the key capabilities of U-Studio and its collaborative 'inside' approach. "We have gained a lot of business insight from our close partnership with Unilever, especially during the pandemic when the world slowed down and we needed to speed up and leverage this insight and technology from our parent agency The BrandTech Group."

When it comes to ideas and award-winning creative, he says, "Having inside intelligence, means we're on the inside, and our U-Studio team is more often than not the longest standing brand custodian - putting us in an advantageous position to evolve with the brands."

"Unlike traditional agencies, our time isn't spent trying to understand the brand but rather understanding the consumer and

connecting the dots,” he explains. “Being on the inside makes the clients/brands objectives our objectives - giving us a holistic understanding of how the campaign fits into the carefully routed brand journey to achieving its objectives.”

This, Spencer says, has been key in taking the Unilever brands and products to the consumer and has contributed tremendously in U-Studio’s award-winning effective creative work. “We understood the gaps and more importantly what was needed to solve them,” he says. “What has been interesting is how consumer behaviour has shifted and why now more than ever the agility of an inhouse studio has become so important.”

He says that it’s no surprise two years after the start of the pandemic to see how e-commerce has grown and how consumer behaviour has changed from an offline to online purchasing habit. “This means that the pandemic has accelerated some of the biggest brands ‘in-housing’ their creative teams,” he adds.

He continues: “The U-Studio ecommerce journey with Unilever began three years ago and the pandemic exponentially accelerated some of the early in-housing structures we already had in place with a continued focus on conversion.”

“Unilever Food Solutions (UFS), their Business-to-Business market struggled at the start of the pandemic with the business pretty much coming to a halt,” he explains. “Chefs were no longer in kitchens nor getting new products or doing demos which to them was a real struggle.”

Spencer explains that the team solved this by creating an augmented reality experience with image recognition that allowed chefs to scan the logo of any UFS product to get recipe ideas and inspire them. “We had to be where the consumer was and drive social commerce, which moved social media beyond its traditional role. We kept the path to purchase as simple as possible which resulted in a higher conversion rate.”

“This year is not without its challenges, particularly within the FMCG sector; raw material prices are rising and we know the impact this has on marketing budgets,” he adds. “We welcome the challenge and we understand that the brands still need to achieve their objectives which allows us to be more innovative in our approach to deliver on the results.”

Commenting on the award-winning effective campaigns developed for Unilever, Nkululeko Vilakazi, creative director at U-Studio, says that he believes the campaigns for Shield, Aromat and OMO have been effective because they are all consumer-centric and purpose driven.

“All the campaigns that we have won prestigious awards for in the past few months are focused on adding value to the consumer by solving every day, real-life pain points,” he explains. “The strong data insights that we leveraged ensured that we were basing the resolve on real-world consumer insights.”

For example, he says, the deodorant category saw an overall decline during lockdown and the data revealed that due to minimal movement consumers were using less deodorant, so for the Shield brand, we gave consumers a way to move more at home during a time when they couldn’t access fitness facilities.

“The data which informed our Aromat campaign, showed that South African youth were struggling with high rates of mental health issues due to unemployment and lockdown - they needed a light-hearted escape.”

What this resulted in, Vilakazi explains, was a campaign, which included relatable entertainment skits that consumers could engage with on any platform they chose and had access to.

“OMO bridged the gap in early childhood development by helping parents and children alike access effective learning resources,” he says. “This campaign was informed by the fact that there had been an increase in digital platforms offering resources for parents that were inaccessible offline because of lockdown.”

“Oliver’s sweet spot right now in South Africa is the agility and speed at which we are able to infiltrate the digital ecosystem and be where it counts both for consumers and brands,” he adds. “Building ‘Inside Intelligence’ is a big part of it, which

involves tailoring the bespoke model to every client's business through a blend of talent, teamwork, and technology and then optimising it for speed, ensuring the client gets outstanding creative that's delivered fast and delivers great results."

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