

Hello and goodbye

The new AdFocus Awards chairperson for 2018-19 is Phumi Mashigo, MD of Ignitive. She takes over the rein from Craig Page-Lee, founder of d-cifr, who has been directly involved in the FM AdFocus Awards programme since 2015, having taken over from Festus Masekwameng as jury chairperson for the period 2016 and 2017.



Phumi Mashigo, MD of Ignitive and new chairperson of the AdFocus Awards.

Mashigo, who has served on AdFocus Awards jury for 2016 and 2017, says she thought about and deliberated on the post when it was offered to her. “It was overwhelming for me and I did not take it lightly. The jury needs strong voices, but also different voices, so we do not have the same debates with the same people while we hope for a different result.”



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Danette Breitenbach 23 Nov 2017



The gravity of what this position entails is very clear to her, having been a member of the jury for the past two years. “To now add to that responsibility the one of being chairperson... to be the one who has the cool head in the midst of very often hectic debate. Could I be that person? I am normally the contrary voice,” says Mashigo.

Lip service game

She says she took a lot from outgoing chairperson, Craig Page-Lee. “He was the cool head in the room, always setting the stage, allowing everyone their voice, while not allowing anyone to run riot. Craig is fair, but he knows how to be tough.”

Key for her will be coming forward and building on the Transformation Award put in place this year. Transformation is one of those things that in a very real way irritates me she says. “It’s a lip service game, and a numbers game as well as a tick box exercise, but despite this we need the discipline of ticking the boxes. “Like anything that requires discipline, it is painful in the beginning, and even irritating, but if you keep at it, then eventually you will have the muscle memory and the match fitness required and you will reap the benefits.”

She is also concerned about the industry which has become serious and boring and everything is difficult. “For me this is a typecast of South Africa and where we are as a nation. We are slumped down.”

We influence the influencers

Yet we are the creatives, the artists and the people who need to pull the nation up, creating conversations to lift our country she says. “Instead we are stuck – stuck in numbers and research and getting it right. So much so that we are not making bold decisions for clients and as a result we are losing our standing in the world. We have forgotten that we are the influencers, we influence the influencers.”

The few moments of magic in the industry are being drowned out by the people worrying about the numbers and where the market is etc., she adds. “As the chairperson of the AdFocus Awards I look forward to finding the work that celebrates the real stuff... where there is spark and flare and joy.”



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For her, the first year of being a jury member is rewarding. “It was magnificent to sit and read through all the submissions and so on judging day to properly get a rich experience, and that translates into the quality of thinking in the selection of the winners.”

Farewell

Page-Lee says each year on the jury brought new experiences and new learnings, with the input and many of the conversations also helping to shape me personally, contributing to my current view of the industry.



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“The great take-away moments are undoubtedly the rigorous debates, the brutal honesty, the intellectual prowess of jury members, the shared belief in improving the overall standards across the industry, spending meaningful time with industry leaders that I respect and look up to on a daily basis, knowing that you are making a difference, making new friends and constantly being exposed to the quickest and sharpest wit of that of David Furlonger and the dry and interrogative nature of Jeremy Maggs.”

The past two years has seen an industry grappling with shrinking budgets due to radical economic decline (not

transformation), increased levels of procurement involvement and disruption, clients continuously wanting more-for-less from agencies, question marks around media buying transparency and strategic independence, slow and ineffective transformation and low levels of integration.

Not a zero-sum game

With all this in mind, he says it is vitally important that agencies stand together to uphold the credibility and purpose of the industry and to ensure that the brands they represent deliver value, integrity and purpose to the consumers that they target.

“This is not a zero-sum game. This is an industry that employs thousands of skilled individuals across South Africa, each one a potential consumer of the respective brands they serve. Let us work to keep these and hopefully many more in the workplace and not give our service away for free.”

Page-Lee does not mince his words when it comes to industry transformation. “In short transformation hardly exists in the industry. Adding that there is not enough meaningful B-BBEE ownership – the international owner agency groups hardly make a positive difference at all in this regard. There are not enough leadership positions.”

There are not enough mentorship programmes and there is very little evidence of the difference agencies are making to the industry, the people and the communities that they serve, he adds.

Drive the transformation agenda

“We are a respectful bunch, united with a common goal – the industry. It is the life-blood that drives us. Let us step out of our shoes and wear another pair for a while – that way we will see what is required to genuinely transform the industry. I’m getting out of my shoes now!”

All I can say to Phumi is: “Please drive the transformation agenda. Please drive the continuous improvement of the industry. Please drive the fact that agencies need to do new things better and differently – enough of the ‘same old same’. Please lead the conversation on the relevance of the digital agency model and help define digital’s role in the genuine integrated agency model.”

The FM AdFocus Awards 2017 took place this Wednesday, 22 November, The Empire, Hill on Empire in Johannesburg, Gauteng.

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