

2022: The year of the Ogilvy 'come back'

By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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At the beginning of this year, there was growing opinion in the market that Ogilvy had lost its shine. There had been a lot of senior management changes, not only at a CEO level, and the agency had dropped in the industry rankings. But as the end of this year approaches the story is very different, with the agency now the most awarded agency in the country for 2022.



Image supplied. Ogilvy is the most awarded agency in the country this year

Pete Case, who was appointed CEO and creative chairman at the beginning of the year says coming in then, there was a lot of work to do both externally and internally.

“We needed to rebuild the agency reputation and trust in market, while internally we had to galvanise the business and everybody inside it,” says Case.

What he had on his side was a knowledge of the business and its people, as he had worked inside Ogilvy before as chief creative officer, following the merger of Gloo and Ogilvy back in 2014.

“Fortunately re-entering the business I knew that there were many great and talented people working really hard in the agency, together with an amazing set of clients to work with. But that there was a lack of clear internal direction.”



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Bringing everyone back

Case explains that the first thing they did was to set a new vision. “It sounds simple, but if everyone is working hard but just in a slightly different direction, it’s nearly impossible for an agency to produce great work and consistency, and that was what was happening.

"So, we set out a new and bold ambition. We then expressed to people very clearly what we felt it would look like in terms of how we each treat each other, what the work should feel like and what it should achieve."

The timing coincided with the ending of Covid. "One of the massively important parts of our story is that we worked out very quickly that when you put people together in a room, your success rate increases dramatically," he explains.

He says there was some resistance to start off with "But bringing our people together made them remember why they were in advertising in the first place. Many of those working remotely went: "oh yeah I remember now how great this energy is when we're together."

The agency hosted numerous Indabas, bringing together people across its offices and specialist disciplines as well as the different leadership teams and clients. Case says, "We certainly made a purposeful effort to create physical connections!"

Their clients followed a similar sentiment. "After the workshops so many clients commented to us; Wow, I have just been reminded why we are with Ogilvy, and I believe it was mostly because they reconnected with and felt the passion of our people."

Finding a new way

A new way of working was also created, called the Open Engine.

"Our new operating system opens the agency up to a more collaborative mindset, introducing more consumer insights and greater understanding of where the consumer meets the product and where the product meets the consumers' lifestyle as well as the media landscape around them.

"Essentially it heightens the insights you're working with from the beginning, whether you are selling a bar of chocolate or a VW Polo, it gives you a much stronger starting point creatively," explains Case.



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The kickstart

He says that where this new approach first shone for the agency was when their biggest client, KFC, went out to pitch at the beginning of the year.

Up against not only local agencies but international agencies such as Mother from London, Ogilvy still managed to win the pitch.

"For anyone to win a pitch as the incumbent agency, is often harder than a new agency, because now they have to go back to their board and say I know we convinced you to allow us to go out to pitch, but we actually want to reappoint the same agency again," says Case. "So we were incredibly proud of this win and grateful of the faith that KFC put in reappointing us."

Winning the pitch signalled the kickstart for the agency that would culminate in one of its best years, producing great work that has seen it win a huge breadth of awards internationally and locally for a large range of clients, across many disciplines from advertising to digital to direct and social – and for creativity and effectiveness.

"In this industry, you're only as good as your last pitch", says Case "But that pitch helped to rebuild our confidence in ourselves and the fact that we could win against the best and could produce great work."

"Unusually, we were asked to produce the actual pitch work and I feel it's turned into some of the strongest work that Ogilvy has done on the KFC brand in many years," he adds.

It's certainly their most famous work. "Importantly we've helped take KFC back to double-digit growth which in these socio-economic times is a wonderful result and underlines our ethos of creating work that works.

"There is a piece of work right in the centre of it, the 'Taste Inspector', which has built very positive consumer engagement and renewed loyalty with a younger audience," he elaborates.

Most awarded agency

From there the agency had several pitches that landed it new business including LUNO, City of Cape Town, Cross & Blackwell, Old Mutual, Marriott, Dulux, Life Healthcare, Environ, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Baby City and ENS Africa.

"I know that we have lots more to do, but it feels like we're back and given the results we've achieved this year, I believe we are," says Case.

The agency was the best performing agency at Bookmarks, Next Gen Awards, Assegai Awards, and the Effie Awards making it the most awarded agency in the country this year.

It was also the country's most awarded agency at Cannes this year, bringing home gold, two silvers, a bronze and seven Shortlist Lions.



Image supplied.

Winning work included the Spotify Sound Tour campaign, a cross-border collaboration between Ogilvy South Africa and Ogilvy Japan.

This year the agency has been involved in more global work than ever before, with work for brands such as Vans, IKEA, Amazon, Nespresso, the European Parliament, and Sennheiser.

Case says the connection to the Ogilvy network was something our leadership team deliberately wanted to ramp up into the agency.

"I had been in a network CCO role during 2021, so I got to know the network very well. In that year, one of my roles was to connect projects and our best talent across various Ogilvy global. We have an amazing network that is so open to collaboration and we're taking full advantage of that."

He says this has given Ogilvy another distinct advantage this year. "Our global business unit has grown hugely during 2022 and is now collaborating with our network across offices which include; New York, Berlin, London, Toronto, Brussels, Paris, Rome, Zurich and Sydney."

"It showcases the quality of our people and skills here in Ogilvy South Africa – particularly in the data & intelligence, digital content and social media spaces," he adds. "This demand for our skills is yet another signal of the high quality of work that we produce as an industry here in SA."



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Moving forward

On top of this the agency is now launching new services into the market, including a TikTok specialist Lab in conjunction with TikTok, as well as a Commerce Lab specialising in e-commerce services.

He compares Ogilvy to a battleship. "We have managed to move a big ship very very fast, and I think our turnaround has been quite remarkable. It's a testament to the amazing people we have working for us and their belief in the new vision. In January we set out to achieve certain goals across a number of years, but we've accomplished a large amount already in the first year, which I think we should be very proud of."

There is always room to improve he says, "This year was our proving year, but we have many new exciting initiatives and plans to introduce next year. Meantime the internal energy and momentum we have makes it a very exciting place to be right now."

"Ogilvy is certainly a place to watch in 2023 and beyond," he adds.

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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