

The celeb PR way with CSA

 By Leigh Andrews

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If you've ever wondered what the realm of celebrity PR's really like, you're in luck. CSA (formerly Celebrity Services Africa) communications director, Davin Phillips lets us in on the power of the Instagrammer and what PR and communications is actually all about...

Celebrity PR is an interesting industry, for a number of reasons.

Take CSA as an example. It's actually a group of companies originating from the original entity, Celebrity Services Africa, based much of its work on talent acquisition, working with both local and international talent in bringing A-Lister celebrities to South Africa.

The acronym CSA really fits, as it incorporates the company's Communication Division for both Africa and North America as Communication Services Africa and Communication Services America respectively, both of which focus on supporting brands through tailored communication strategies.



Davin Phillips

This African capacity and capability was put to great use in a cross-market strategy across Africa, one that Phillips goes so far as to single out as a stand-out. "We ran and continue to run successful campaigns across the continent - in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Angola and the Indian Ocean Islands. In fact, South Africa now accounts for only 30% of our group turnover."

But how does a local PR company get so good at what it does that the bulk of its new work is based outside the country's borders? These include the Johnnie Walker Nigeria trademark, for which CSA has been the lead content agency - a multi-faceted campaign with extensive use of social media, complimented by traditional media; as well as key Diageo Reserve global brand ambassadors on an international campaign; and the launch of the new Hugo

Boss collections for both the events and communications divisions in Johannesburg.

Intrigued, I found out more about a day in the life of this celebrity communications agency...

■ 1. *Let's go back to the beginning - tell us about the agency's origins.*

Phillips: The agency was founded by Fran and Marc le Chat in the mid-90s in Johannesburg. Fran has over three decades of PR expertise and Marc over 25 years of journalism experience. The company then relocated to Cape Town in 2003.

■ 2. *The question on everyone's lips when you tell them what you do: What's the basic work flow or creative process in an agency like this?*

Phillips: For our communication division, it all begins with strategising a brand's DNA, with brand journalism at its core. This is all aimed at populating content to position targeted stories in key media outlets, while also growing the audience for a brand's own media platforms. We like to say that we assist our clients in building their brand equity, which really boils down to building an emotional equity between the brand and its targeted audience. Content really is king considering the brand clutter today, which makes it even harder to stand out. It's a craft that we specialise in.

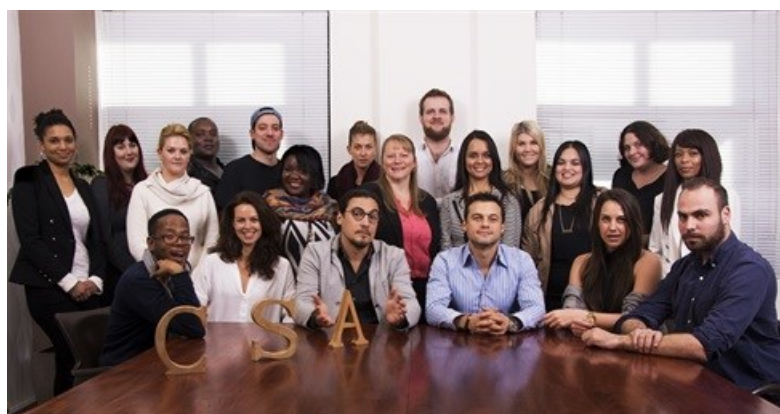
In terms of our artist attainment division, which has a global artist reach, we work closely with creative agencies in identifying relevant artists to suit brands and their marketing objectives.

■ **3. Sounds busy. How does what you do differ from all the others out there? What makes you stand out from the rest?**

Phillips: The fact that we conduct ourselves as an independently owned news-room, presenting newsworthy angles across all media channels.

We are also more present internationally than ever - with an office in Los Angeles and an office in Dubai opening soon, along with representation in Paris, Rome, Luanda, Nairobi and Lagos - giving us a global view on what we do. In addition, as CSA is immersed in the world of entertainment and luxury brands, we are uniquely positioned to access the world's hottest talent. This is in a world where the confluence of brands and influential talent are more important than ever.

That said, CSA's major strength is our ability to ensure client content is placed in targeted media outlets on an earned-media basis. That foundation is based on understanding what is newsworthy and knowing how to shape our client's story in a way that will make headlines across traditional media or via owned media platforms, where our objective is to build an audience and then keep them engaged within the respective community.



The CSA team..

■ **4. Great. Tell us more about how your team has changed of late to enhance your overall skill set.**

Phillips: The content creation, design and social media teams are important facets in our on-going growth. Writing has always been a core part of our business and, with the growth of brand story-telling, we have invested more in this department. As an example, a senior sub-editor from the *Cape Argus* has recently joined our Cape Town office in our ongoing efforts to grow our content development team within each market.

Our strategy is to continue developing and focusing on markets across Africa, while expanding our efforts in the UAE, with the opening of our new office in Dubai later this year and growing our team in Nigeria. Media is at the core of our agency, and we will continue to be selective of the brands we represent, while still enjoying being active in both the public and private sectors. We will also continue to evolve the talent programme on the African continent and, in turn, make exciting content available to the public at large across new media platforms. The US office is also making significant headway in the talent acquisition environment.

Working in the luxury brand environment, the creation of well-curated brand journalism and the use of Influencers are key, as is our heightened understanding of the way people access and digest media today.

■ **4. Let's end off with some insights for the industry. What trends do you see as the biggest to come in 2015?**

Phillips: While one must always be vigilant of the shifting socio-political context, the entry of international brands into Africa will increase. In addition, content marketing will continue to evolve, driven by the extraordinary growth of smartphones, revolutionising the way in which brands communicate to markets across the continent, in both a broad and personalised sense.

Equally, how people consume media will keep evolving, with traditional media not having the influence it once enjoyed. Consider the rise of the "Instagrammer", where an individual can have over 200k followers, and offer a higher reach than a glossy magazine, to a targeted and specific audience.

Going forward, I think agencies need to be mindful of the media journey of targeted consumers. There is still an appetite for print and TV, but the influence of traditional media has lost impact and to-day one needs to be conscious of how to get the message across platforms - such as BuzzFeed, Facebook and blogs - that encourage shared content.

We recently ran a campaign, for instance, where 70% of our target market consume news or information via social media, with news bulletins often being shared via newsfeed on Facebook.

Brand journalism is absolutely key and is growing in importance. Content marketing determines the successful outcome of a campaign. It is a specialist skill set, which we have invested in heavily, all of which provides a solid foundation for our agency culture and DNA.

That it does. If you'd like to find out more, [visit their website](#) and follow the [CSA Twitter feed](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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