

Africa's newest creative agency: Raising the Bar

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Marls Truter, Shounak Guhathakurta and Yash Deb (with silent partner Animesh Deb) make up the formidable trio of The Bar Africa, a new creative agency that is focused on Africa, with first-hand knowledge and experience of numerous different African markets, and what it takes to conceptualise campaigns that reflect the nuances and realities of African markets



The Bar (left to right) co-founders Yash Deb, Animesh Deb, Marls Truter, and Shounak Guhathakurta

Truter, MD at The Bar Africa, moved to Kenya in 2019 to join Ogilvy Africa.

Guhathakurta was her creative partner mainly on Airtel Africa. In their constant pursuit for great work, they naturally became friends. The third member of their agency, Deb joined Ogilvy Africa a year later.

There was an instant chemistry between the three – and they produced amazing work, but also became firm friends.

Doing it differently

But they says while they love what they do, they found themselves more and more doing less and less of it.

“In the race to churn out work at the speed of technology, more and more advertising agencies are dropping the ball when it comes to the basics, sacrificing proper ideation and strategic purpose at the altar of platform integration and multi-channel deployment,” explain the three.

“So we started, jokingly, talking about how we would do things differently, and this evolved into us planning how we could do exactly that,” they say.

Their idea is to add real value to their clients, not just firefighting, while developing a skill set in the industry across the region and thus continuing to raising the bar.

An exceptional trio

Both Deb and Guhathakurta are exceptional at their craft.

The creative partner, Guhathakurta 's mind is a repository for, mostly useful, information which always keeps things interesting while Deb is the calm daydreamer with an eye for detail.

Deb headed Ogilvy Africa's creative department where he created history by conceptualising *Lesso Lessons*, a campaign that won East, West and Central Africa's very first Gold Lion at Cannes and a coveted Yellow Pencil at D&AD.

Completing the trio is Truter, who keeps a keen eye on the road ahead. “Her passion for driving excellence in the work we produce, the company we keep and always advocating for basic education, completes our trio.”

Hub and spoke model

The Bar Africa's approach is premised on a hub and spoke model which is based on finding the most appropriate talent for each project and campaign.

“Technology frees us from geographical boundaries which means we can work with an animation team based in Istanbul or a copywriter based in Vancouver,” explains Guhathakurta.

Their goal is to position advertising and marketing as a valued discipline capable of growing the bottom line and creating work that moves the needle.

“We don't intend to ever become a behemoth but rather to stay true to our values and create meaningfully different work,” says Truter.

That said, and while they do boast a lot of experience they are honest enough to admit that they are not experts in every category or discipline.

“What we do is put together a crack team of experts and practitioners that is best placed to attack a particular brief or project.

“So instead of our clients inheriting resources, they get a curated team apt for their need. Our modus operandi is to fall in love with the problem first, interrogate, deconstruct it and ask a million questions before proposing actual solutions.”

A 'glocal' identity

The three believe that Africa has well and truly arrived.

“Africa is a market fertile for innovation in the fields of tech and the creative arts,” they say.

And as a new agency, they have a clean slate to play with.

“Unburdened with the legacy of a certain kind of work that is peculiar to the region. Also, we believe the Marcom industry here is at an inflexion point in its evolution which points to incredibly exciting times ahead.”

They want to focus on African brands and take them to the world.

“Africa is one of the world’s fastest growing and youngest consumer markets. So yes, we want to build African brands and be part of the team that puts them on a global stage, but at the same time also work with international brands and give them a ‘glocal’ identity and place in the region.”

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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