

Khensani Nobanda - why the Bookmarks are important

In this interview with Khensani Nobanda, 2023 IAB South Africa Bookmark Awards jury president and group executive for marketing and corporate affairs at Nedbank, shares her thoughts on the importance of the IAB Bookmark Awards.



Image supplied. Khensani Nobanda, 2023 IAB South Africa Bookmark Awards jury president at the recent Bookmarks Awards event

Q: What do you feel is the purpose that awards such as these serve other than being a tool for agencies and publishers to promote their work?

A: For me, it's more about raising the quality and the standard of the digital work that we have in this country because when you reward great work, it really challenges your peers and other agencies, other publishers, to do better themselves. The promotion is almost secondary to what it does for the entire industry because when you see what good looks like and what great work is being rewarded, you as an agency or as a client of an agency will say, 'For us to make an impact, we must at least be at that standard or even higher'.

Q: How do you feel about all the different technological innovations that are being used, not just in the industry but on a mass scale, such as AI innovations such as ChatGPT, for example?

A: AI and tech like that don't scare me. I think it gives us a starting point or a base but we still need people — sharp, creative people — to be able to take what that is and take it to the next level, make it better or even say that it doesn't work because no one knows the brand narrative of the client as much as the agency or the client will so there's still a need for

that personal touch. You can put all of those elements as a guardrail when you input it into an AI tool but, ultimately, someone must look at it and judge whether it works or not. In that sense, it adds to the industry.

Q: Given that, what are the most important aspects of recognising creative talent? How are those criteria defined because isn't any form of creative work really subjective?

A: I certainly think it is but where the Bookmarks then take it is not just focusing on the creativity; it's about the results of the creativity.

One of the things I love about digital is, as a marketer, it's become so much easier for me to speak with our board about retail and marketing investment because the attribution around what you put into the market and the actual success of a campaign is a lot stronger and better, and because of that strong attribution on results, what sets something like the Bookmarks apart is that yes, digitally, it's an app or it's a creative idea or whatever it is, it's creatively strong, but if the results are not there, it can't be an award-winning entry because then it didn't actually deliver. In digital, we almost have a higher purpose, a higher standard that we need to set around return on marketing investment.

Q: How would you say awards such as these shine a light on the diversity of the South African creative industry?

A: It starts with the jury. . I look at diversity very broadly and, as a starting point, it's important to ensure that the jury chairs and the panels are diverse. What this means when we're judging is that there are multiple opinions in the room.

As a Bookmarks Committee, we always want to make sure that the juries are a diverse group of people.

Last year when I saw how well the car brands did at the Bookmarks, I said to my team — and we're in banking — 'Let's do some case studies on some of the car brands and what they're doing from a digital perspective'. And that diversity allows brands, publishers and agencies in other categories to learn from each other. So by ensuring we receive entries broadly — from FMCG to banking to cars, all of these industries — it helps ensure that diversity.

Q: Are there any other ways in which you believe creative talent can be recognised outside of the awards showcase?

A: I think clients need to acknowledge agencies a lot more than they do; we don't need to wait for awards. And sometimes our work doesn't win awards, you know? I was looking at a campaign we did last year for deposits at Nedbank.

It's not an award-winning campaign at all. It's nice because we aren't going to put crap work out there, but it's not going to win us any awards.

However, if you look at our market share within that space, it has started to increase and I shared that with the agency because it's the result of the work that we've done together. I certainly think that we as clients should be stepping up more and sharing with our agencies that the work we're doing is actually having a positive impact on the brand and the business.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.