

Adfocus honours Mariana O'Kelly with Industry Leader award

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Ogilvy Johannesburg executive creative director Mariana O'Kelly has been recognised for her ongoing contribution to growing the creative industry, winning the special award for Industry Leader of the Year at the Financial Mail Adfocus Awards 2018.



Mariana O'Kelly

Mariana's creative leadership has helped secure Ogilvy's position among the most highly regarded creative teams, with the agency named Creative Circle's top-ranked South African agency for two years running.

In her more than two decades as a creative, Mariana has worked on large local and global brands like KFC, Castle, Mondelez, Investec, Kimberley Clarke, MTV, Multichoice, Cell C, Virgin, BMW, Mercedes Benz and many more.

During her time at Ogilvy, Mariana has built an environment that unlocks the best of her team's creative potential – as proven by their five Grand Prix awards at the Loeries and three Cannes Grand Prix awards. Under Mariana's creative stewardship, Ogilvy Johannesburg has also won 62 globally recognised awards, making her the most awarded female in the Ogilvy network.

She was chosen from 500 offices worldwide to join Ogilvy's 10-member Global Creative Council, advising on Ogilvy's creative product across the organisation.

Mariana is widely recognised for her efforts to grow and nurture South African talent, and has also been recognised by the widely respected Gunn Report as the 12th best performing ECD in the world.

Asked what she loves most about the advertising industry, O'Kelly emphasises the sincere warmth of much of the work, how it can celebrate human shortcomings in ways that resonate and capture the popular imagination. "Where else on earth can stories of vulnerability, failure and authenticity achieve business results," she laughs.

"One of the most significant industry developments over the past few years has been the shift to measurable results," she says. "Today, the impact of every piece of work we put out there can be measured hourly. We have to balance inspiring ideas with commercial impact."

As a woman in advertising, Mariana knows creative leadership comes with its own challenges, but says the onus is on women to define success on their own terms.

A mother of two who puts her family first, Mariana is at the forefront of Ogilvy's gender-transformation agenda, which has seen her creative department hiring the most female creatives in the WPP network. She believes passionately that mothers can successfully balance parenting and workplace demands, and that the best insights and stories often come from creatives living real lives, understanding real challenges and solving real problems.

Mariana also notes that the industry thrives on diversity, but points out that it needs to expand its understanding of what

diversity is. People are so much more than their cultural, racial and gender signifiers, she says. “Our diversity lies in our unique stories.”

A way to reveal these stories, she says, is by growing our next generation of creatives. She embraces industry development programmes like o25, Ogilvy South Africa’s Graduate Internship Programme. The programme sees 25 young people join the agency for a year, where they are exposed to planning, creative, data and tech, account management and job management functions on live projects.”

“This way we help with real job experience and get a chance to expose young talent to great opportunities, so they can grow into the leaders of the future,” she says.

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