

Is your idea award-worthy?

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As submissions open for [Cannes Lions 2019](#), [DAN SA](#) catches up with Mike Middleton, multiaward-winning brand strategist and futurist, about what makes award-worthy work. (Plus, a few words from Koo Govender on awards entries.)



Mike Middleton knows a thing or two about winning awards. Under his former watch as Chief Marketing Officer, [KFC's radio ads](#) won numerous Cannes Lions awards, as well as a Grand Prix at the 2017 [Loeries](#). Mike's also helped scoop Cannes Lions for the likes of Castle Lager and Cadbury, plus he won the Marketing & Leadership Innovation Award at the Loeries a couple of years back. Here, he shares some secrets for coming up with awardwinning ideas.

Be part of the conversation

So what was it that made those KFC "Sad Man Meal" radio ads so award worthy? Mike believes successful ideas are the ones born out of an ability to see the world through the eyes of the consumer, and an awareness of what's going on culturally and in society.

"The notion of 'being a man' is changing rapidly in society with a movement away from stereotypical macho-masculine roles where men drink beer, work on cars and don't care about the clothes they wear. The 'man meal' taps into this cultural shift and expresses it in a way that is bold, brave, funny and highly entertaining. The ads are so insightful and engaging that people from all ages and backgrounds can relate to them. The role of the product is seamlessly integrated into the story without trying too hard," says Mike.

"Too often we are so focused on well-crafted constructs that are a perfect representation of the brand manifesto or positioning, that we land up with commercials that are strategically perfect but creatively dead. In modern-day marketing, it is far more important to be engaging with consumers in their daily conversations with content that is relevant to those conversations, expressed in a way that is distinctive, encouraging further conversation."

Producing distinctive work, says Mike, involves never settling for "good". Which brings us to Mike's next piece of advice...

Get comfortable

"Good work usually makes you feel a little uncomfortable and can be a hard sell to the rest of the business, especially those

who don't understand marketing and advertising. Too often marketers aren't prepared to take on this fight and so they settle for safe work that won't ruffle any feathers. Bravery is critical if you want to deliver breakthrough work and you have to be prepared to put your butt on the line. If you're delivering brilliant creative work that is strategically sound, it's an easy fight to fight. If the work is creatively brilliant but strategically irrelevant, you're going to burn your butt," says Mike.

Essential takeaways

Getting the creatively-brilliant-and-strategically-sound formula right is something we could talk about for hours, but for now we'll have to settle for these nuggets from Mike:

1. Keep it simple

Simplicity of thought is essential. It's about distilling the complicated into a simple and cohesive story where all elements seamlessly align, making it super easy for consumers to instantly understand.

2. Show insight

Ideas need to be deeply rooted in a relevant consumer truth.

3. Be culturally relevant

This shows an understanding of what is happening in culture and makes your idea part of the daily conversation.

4. Put the consumer first

Work needs to demonstrate a real understanding of the target market.

5. Be creative

This might seem obvious, but you need to find new and different ways of expressing your idea.

6. Be bold

Your work will stand out without having to try too hard if it challenges the entry category norms and assumptions.

7. Be timeless

The strategy behind the work needs to stand the test of time.

Submitting 2019 Cannes entries?

[DANSA](#) CEO (and former Cannes Lions judge) Koo Govender has this advice for those submitting Cannes Lions entries this year:

"Marketing has become a complex discipline and awards category, so campaigns need to be fresh, innovative, simple, relevant and cut through the clutter. Entries need to evoke emotion, build trust with the consumer and be results-orientated. Campaigns must deliver clear results, while having a creative edge, being well executed and beautifully crafted."

There you have it. Now go forth and win!

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