

The hidden cost of creativity



By [Vanita 'Bezi Phiri](#)

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I've been exposed to a myriad of advertising campaigns that are inspiring in terms of creativity, but essentially poor in selling the product they're advertising. It explains why ad agencies lose accounts that have won them prestigious awards. A lot of ads may get the audience's attention, and perhaps even entertain them, yet they fail to drive them as consumers: the worst example being clever ads whose products the audience forgets.

In the advertising industry, sometimes we apply our creative license to lure clients into risky and eccentric ideas - supported by a rationale that is as outlandish as the work itself. Of course we are aware that our work ought to amount to figures in the client's annual report. But at that moment, we are drunk with the excitement of art. We often overlook the point that we are paid to sell and not to express or entertain, and that the old mama at home doesn't give a hoot about a Golden Lion award.

The art of selling

Someone said to me that advertising people create work for fellow advertising people - and in some cases specifically for the creative awards judges. What creatives may delight in, the man at home may find uninspiring. And as David Ogilvy once wrote, "if it doesn't sell, it isn't creative."

Don't get me wrong, creativity is essential. No brand wants to be common and forgettable. But at the same time, no brand wants to spend all their resources in exchange for mere gaping mouths.

Saying versus selling

South Africa has had great entertaining ads from various brands, but often there is a disconnection between what the ads are saying and what they are selling. If a brand is number one in terms of awards and public commentary but third in sales, one ought to wonder about its overall strategy.

I'm not saying the solution is to do away with creativity - gosh, no! But to align it to the real world where the true 'clients' are - as in the people that make up the market. Instead, marketers today measure the success of a campaign by the number of retweets and Facebook likes. But that alone isn't buying. Commentary on the social platform (or any platform) may represent a market but not necessarily a buying one.

To steal words from David Ogilvy once more, he wrote that when you go through a magazine and choose the ads that you like best, "you will probably pick those with beautiful illustrations or clever copy. You forget to ask if your favourite ads

would make you want to buy the product." My personal take is that, as creatives, we are guilty of forgetting that though we may be artists, above all, we are marketers.

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