

Grey Adventures rolls out to SA

 By Jessica Tennant

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The Grey Group's Grey Adventures startup incubator is now operational in its Johannesburg, Singapore and American offices as it continues to roll out across the global network.

The Group started Grey Adventures to turn ideas into businesses by working with emerging tech experts in the creative industry and clients to spin out products and services that surface during the branding and campaign development process, and that it can scale for both the agency and its clients, as reported in [Adweek](#).

The unit is built on the model of value exchange where all parties benefit. Startups with complementary skills in data, insights, CX, media, creative tech, prototyping and production, ad tech, AR/VR/360° content, experiential and e-commerce are invited to apply. And clients are encouraged to participate via live briefs, workshops and inspiration sessions, as well as just spending time working with the different teams.

Candidates are offered space in the respective offices and shared access to Grey's clients and support services in return for access to their advice, learnings and expertise.

"Here at Grey, we are focused on solving business challenges, not just advertising challenges. We want Grey Adventures to shape the future of the agency by exploring, testing, learning and seeing the possibilities of creativity through technology, innovation and collaboration," explains Francois du Preez, chief digital officer at Grey Africa.

"Starting up a business can be difficult. From managing overhead costs to client and staff demands, starting up is risky and stressful, so we're privileged as an established network to be able to afford start-up companies the opportunity to focus on the important bit... managing your business without unnecessary operational concerns."

I interviewed Du Preez to find out more about this open culture of collaboration from a local perspective...

■ Why a start-up incubator? Why/how is this relevant to Grey?

Grey's purpose is to be the world leader in applying creativity to solve business problems, and it is our belief that some of the most rewarding opportunities for brands happen at the intersection of business, popular culture and tech innovation.



Francois du Preez, chief digital officer at Grey Africa.

The tech and innovation landscape is, however, expanding exponentially with new specialisations constantly emerging.

As a digitally focused agency, we are expected to be at the forefront of these new, creative technologies, and whilst we strive to continuously embrace these technologies, it is challenging to keep pace and to have all these specialisations in-house.

“ We found a way to essentially have our cake and eat it too whilst ensuring a win-win situation for all partners involved. ”

With Grey Adventures, we can offer our clients any technological solution they require, with a single point of contact and

creative strategy at the core.

Grey Adventures also helps Grey:

- Remain a truly modern creative agency that dares to be bold in our quest to help brands stay relevant to their customers;
- Open up opportunities for our employees to learn and elevate their expertise in areas that are crucial for their client interaction as well as our competitiveness;
- Create our own innovation practice to advise clients on brand/ business transformation, data, innovation and experience design, etc.;
- Develop Famously Effective solutions with deep experts in emerging technologies.

▣ **How is Grey innovating in this regard?**

It is in our best interest to nurture young talent and we've been actively doing this for years through our internship programme.

When we aid in the development of creative technology, we are growing the entire category. While some agencies tend to feel threatened by the development of tech, we've decided to embrace this growth and help these rule-breakers flourish. We are not only pushing the limits of our industry, we are helping to build the economy by creating opportunities.

For the startups, we offer an environment that fosters growth and offers major opportunities and exposure. Had we decided to bring all these specialisations in-house in the traditional sense, we would've run the risk of watering down our core offering and being average at a range of tech solutions.

Through Grey Adventures, we can keep our focus on strategy and creativity, whilst partnering with best of breed emerging tech startups, and these partner companies get to focus on developing their respective skill sets without the burdens most startups have to deal with. It truly is a win-win situation.



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4 Apr 2018



▣ **Why the focus on tech experts in the creative industry?**

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“ *The tech startups feel like a very natural marriage – they bring new and exciting things to the table that augment our core business proposition and philosophy, and in return, we have the network to help them grow.* ”

We can create opportunities for these companies through our clients and contacts by incorporating their tech solutions into solving our client's business and communication challenges.

▣ **How does this achieve Grey's purpose of applying creativity to solve business problems?**

Today, solving business problems requires a blend of innovative thinking, creativity and technology. No one agency or company can offer every solution or service expertly all of the time, so Grey has decided to rather leverage our competitive differentiator and that is our 'Open culture' of radical creative collaboration, where we bring the best minds together to solve business problems creatively.

Sometimes the best minds are in-house, but often we seek and collaborate with experts in all sorts of fields. And sometimes those collaborations flourish into long-term relationships and partnerships, such as the start-up incubations. These complementary offerings in tech, innovation, insights, CX, CRM, performance media, data, analytics, etc. augment our primary offering and result in a much more powerful solve for our clients.



Grey Johannesburg wins Wood Pencil at D&AD 2018

Grey Africa 2 May 2018



■ **Why the value exchange model?**

We like to get these companies involved and integrated into our business. If they sit in a corner in our office, isolated from the rest of the agency, no one wins. We want them to take part in our briefing and brainstorming sessions so they can bring their ideas to the table early on, and we can help develop these into workable solutions.

■ **What is the selection process?**

There needs to be synergy in both culture and expertise. We want to work with companies that will fit in with our culture whilst bringing something new to the table that we don't already offer and that we believe we can help develop. The rules aren't set in stone. We base our decisions on whether to give them a go or not simply on how we feel after we meet with the founding entrepreneurs. The process is uncomplicated, agile and based on intuition and connection. Our culture is really important to us and we protect and nurture it carefully.

■ **How long are the successful candidates allowed to stay?**

There is no set rule. As long as they are growing and contributing, they are welcome to stay.



[Behind the Selfie] with... Francois du Preez

Leigh Andrews 7 Oct 2015



■ **Comment on the current state of startups and entrepreneurship in SA.**

I always find it interesting to look at entrepreneurs' LinkedIn profiles and to see the number of companies they've owned. The list is usually quite extensive and the companies seem to last a year or two at best.

But I suppose that is the nature of entrepreneurs: they are resilient at heart. It's hard out there. You might be an amazing VR specialist who can create incredible work but have absolutely no idea how to run a business or market yourself. To run a business, you need the full package, unfortunately.

How can a developer become a managing director, financial director and new business director combined, overnight? Running your own business forces you to stop doing what you are good at and start doing what you might know nothing of.

“ Without the right partner, it's almost impossible to succeed out there. There are obviously exceptions; we have a lot of amazing independent companies who've managed to crack this. That being said, I am rooting for them – it's the startups that change the game and small businesses that will create jobs and drive the economy, and we need more of them. ”

■ **How do you believe Grey Adventures is making an impact?**

We are giving startups a chance at making it in an extremely competitive landscape by introducing them to some of the most incredible brands in SA and abroad. We give them a home that fosters growth and we actively push their boundaries while they push ours. If these startups succeed, they employ more people. This can only help in a country with such an appalling unemployment rate.

Due to our borderless production approach, these companies are exposed to global briefs and have to start competing on a global stage, giving them a massive advantage in the local market. Most importantly, the solutions that the start-up partners in the Grey Adventures incubation provide, bolster the integrated solutions for our clients and deliver far more effective results.



Grey Africa wins big at Creative Circle Awards

Grey Africa 26 Mar 2018



■ **How does this impact extend to the advertising/creative industry?**

A lot of startups fail in the first year due to mismanagement or a lack of new business opportunities. Some of these failed startups could dramatically change the arena they play in if given the chance. If we help disruptive businesses in the ad-tech space to get off the ground and thrive, we'll help them push the boundaries of our industry without the threats most startups face.

“ We believe that Grey Adventures is truly pushing the entire category by shaping the future of advertising through creative technology. ”

■ **What does the future of the agency look like to you?**

Within our network, we are seeing an increase in borderless production with work being produced in various centres of excellence in geographies all over the world. For example, we produce mobile apps with our Silicon Valley-based sister company, [ArcTouch](#), because they are the best in the world doing work for Disney, Audi and Levi's.

We are seeing the thinking and overarching creativity being managed by the incumbent agency, whilst various specialists within the group bring their expertise to the table for best of breed execution. Radical collaboration and coordination of these specialist disciplines reap the greatest rewards and results. WPP agencies continue to find new ways to join forces and collaborate to provide our clients with the best service and more effective solutions.

■ **What are your thoughts regarding other agencies replicating this model?**

One of the key learnings of the Grey Adventures incubation, which we'd like to share with other companies, is that we would encourage you to emulate our model. It might seem crazy, risky and hard work but it is in fact really liberating in so many ways. It is amazing what you can achieve when you have an open mind and an open heart and are willing to collaborate for mutual benefit. Everybody wins.

Grey Africa will continue to add to its cohort of startups and is currently on the lookout for a photographer and film director team to share its existing content studio. Interested candidates can mail gavin.stafford@grey.co.za to apply.

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