

The ad industry needs more beautiful stories

By [Carl Willoughby](#)

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In this Q&A with Bizcommunity.com, Carl Willoughby, executive creative director of OpenCo, discusses his key trends for 2017.



Carl Willoughby

1. What are the key trends for 2017 in your industry?

2016 delivered Pokemon Go, chatbots, Facebook messenger and more. The communication landscape is clearly changing. 2017 will certainly show a more dramatic shift in marketing using technology. Artificial intelligence in communication is fast becoming a reality; making our lives simpler and hopefully more efficient. Clients want to mine more data.

Successful brands, the brave ones, will reinvent themselves to form a bigger part of our lives. And with the current state of the economy we'll see brands pushing more information to their consumers with our clients demanding more ROI. It's going to be an interesting year.

Perhaps with the rise of mobile, Facebook and video we'll see more brands behave differently. Perhaps more content, relevant content, will become a trend. I hope so. I'd love to see the local version of John Lewis stories by Christmas 2017. We don't see that in South Africa. We're not telling those beautiful stories.

Perhaps with the media mix becoming even more fragmented this will force marketers to talk to their consumers in a more relevant manner. Deliver facts where it's necessary, tell the stories that deliver the emotion where appropriate.

2. Your game changer trend for the year?

We're a small agency. When I worked at bigger agencies the feeling was always that as a big agency we should behave like the small ones, with that nothing-to-lose attitude. We inherently operate this way but we've got to keep reminding ourselves of that. Our recent win at Adfocus helped us cement the fact that we're capable in the small agency space, but it's pushing us to that next big thing. So in 2017 I'd like to see us shift our thinking to that of a bigger agency.

3. What do you hope to see more of in 2017?

I seldom watch linear television but when I do I find it hard to be excited by the work I see. Even radio. I don't hear anything that really jumps out. It's hard. I hear and see things that feel pretty pedestrian. Nothing really makes me think or feel anything. Brands seem to be investing in more experiences but generally the standard of the work seems to have dropped. It feels like people are answering the brief, but not really creating memorable work. And we're all guilty of that. We need less vanilla, more work that stands out.

4. What do you hope to see less of in the New Year?

A less one-size-fits-all approach to communication. Less assumptions, more insights. Also the millennial approach to delivery, that everything is instant. Everything's moving at a faster rate and generally we have to deliver more, quicker, delivered yesterday. I'd like some things to slow down a bit. Give us the time to craft. Don't just tick the box, make sure it's the best box communicating in its best form ever. I think the industry reputation has also been compromised over the last while. Because of the 'culture of instant' I feel that it's become increasingly harder for agencies to build a reputation of trust and capability.

5. How will you keep yourself and your team inspired?

Being exposed to new technologies. I often get people into the agency to talk about things that are unfamiliar to us. We try and have a very open culture where we can talk about things, share things/ideas.

6. What book have you recently read that stood out for you?

'Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that can't stop talking'.

7. Best advice on keeping positive when times are tough?

The best way to get over something is to work through it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carl Willoughby @thewilloughby is Executive Creative Director of OpenCo. He worked at a number of agencies in both Cape Town and Johannesburg. He even helped launch a telecoms company in the Middle-East. He's worked on a number of brands across various categories from Bell's whisky to Old Mutual, VW, Audi, KFC and more. As a CD he managed a number of accounts including DSTV, Castle Lager, Nissan, Tiger brands and Distell. Currently he is working on brands such as Jameson, BMW, Incredible Connection and the Apartheid Museum. In his spare time he plays squash to keep the stress levels low.

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