

Tap into new-generation thinking or stagnate

By Leigh Andrews

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This month's New Generation Awards saw G&G Digital named winner of nine awards for clients, including overall agency of the year. Here, executive creative director, Desiree Gullan explains the importance of digital interaction in the current climate of constant community engagement.

As co-founder and creative director of G&G Digital, Gullan herself has won multiple local and international awards for her work. Also a [judge at the New Generation Awards](#), she attributes the agency's success to their determination to not just meet but exceed clients' marketing goals, especially in the competitive digital marketing space.



G&G Digital's New Generation Awards 2016 haul.

Not bad for an agency that started in a Seattle Coffee Shop eight years ago when Gullan and husband Michael started [cold-calling potential clients](#) that resonated with them and has gone on to become the 'fastest growing digital agency in SA' due to its early [guerrilla marketing](#) tactics.

Making a real difference for clients and customers alike

Shifting focus to present day and what the overall agency of the year thus award means to the agency, Gullan says, "Our agency has always been committed to producing breakthrough work for our clients. And in today's highly competitive digital landscape, brands are finding it extremely difficult to stand out amongst their competitors – and all the other interference users experience online." That's why they take the time to understand their clients and their brands at a deep level in getting clarity on KPIs and what they want to achieve with their marketing communications. They then create experiences that touch their target audiences' lives. That's proof of their commitment to making a difference for brands. The award therefore acknowledges all the hard work, passion and time that takes place behind the scenes based on the enthusiasm and dedication of the team of "pathological overachievers".



The G&G Digital team

Speaking of the importance of focusing on a millennial strategy for the ‘new generation’ then, both as an audience and platform/communication medium, Gullan says, “It’s critical – both as an agency and for brands. Consumers are spending much of their waking time online and it’s no longer limited to the upper LSMs.” She explains that smartphones are almost ubiquitous in SA with Pew Research 2016 confirming that 42% of the population are online and connected. So, while it’s true that data is costly, South Africans are inventive and street smart. “If we want to get online, we’ll find a way – even if we’ve run out of data. Brands that tap into this and create experiences that break through and add value have the edge.”

Redefining the ‘new generation’

Gullan adds that the term ‘new generation’ doesn’t just refer to a younger generation age-wise – instead, “It’s a collective term to describe the massive wave of consumers, of all ages, communicating, working, socialising and existing with digital at the centre of their lives. I struggle to think of a brand or sector that doesn’t have some form of digital interaction forming part of the path to purchase.”



Desire Gullan

As an example of this in action, she says “as a brand, you can’t build your house on rented property” – like a social media platform. Instead, you have to have an owned content platform and draw users in. A blog does this well, even better if it performs a real community service. Moving on to discuss content marketing and why it appeals to consumers, Gullan says: “Native advertising is an immensely powerful strategy for placing brand editorial and advertising messages in relevant and credible spaces.” That’s because the brand messaging looks and feels like non-branded content on a channel. “Done well, consumers are much more receptive to native advertising as the content is packaged to align with the content the user is looking for, or in the space and form for which the user has a preference. It’s much more personal and relevant. Great native advertising requires smart content strategy, design and even smarter media planning and buying,” explains Gullan.

Social media’s impact on business sustainability

With this month’s increased focus on all things sustainability-related, and G&G Digital taking home a silver award in the New Generation Awards’ community engagement category, Gullan explained how companies can focus their communications so as to improve the world around them.

She said, “There are brands that make a difference to the world around them and those that don’t. It’s key for brands that don’t to actively seek out ways to improve and make a positive impact on relevant communities and environments. Even small initiatives will assist.” That’s because consumers are more conscious about capitalism and the impact it has on the

world around them and are more open to brands that 'give back'.

She adds that it's important for brands to be honest and authentic about their community service and upliftment initiatives – no [greenwashing or goodwashing](#), please. She says, “Consumers are digitally savvy and street-smart and will sniff out inauthenticity and make it known to their communities – especially in the social space. Brands with an authentic focus on sustainability as a core part reap the additional benefits of earned coverage in the form of social word-of-mouth and media publicity. Social media, particularly, is making a massive impact on business and brands and how they communicate with consumers. Our growing love of social media isn't just changing the way we communicate – it's changing the way we do business, the way we're governed, and the way we live in society. And it's doing so at breakneck speed.” See the example from the 'Pawspective' site set up for Bayer Group below. While sponsored by the brand, the brand itself isn't participating in overt brand messaging and marketing but instead committed to providing a safe space to learn, grow and share information and experiences around animal health:



The Pawspective
about 8 years ago

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In addition to this, Gullan points out that the rate at which information is shared in digital channels, specifically social media, is helping people and organisations alike tackle social challenges – from human rights to education to climate change. She says: “The Arab Spring, Fees Must Fall, #NekNominations are good examples of how social media can change the world. And more and more we're seeing crimes, human rights violations, and unconscious behaviour called to account.” Sharing a personal account from the consumer end of the scale, Gullan says: “I was personally moved and forever changed by a video I saw on Facebook of a child nearly removed from her mother's trolley at the Mall of Africa. I made it my personal mission to tell every mother I came in contact with about the importance of being hypervigilant about their children's safety in public spaces.” She concludes: “Did you know that a child goes missing every five hours in South Africa? Social media and digital has the potential to provide important information like this to the right audiences in minutes.”

That's the crux of it. [Click here](#) for the full list of New Generation Award winners, [here](#) for more from Gullan, [here to view their case studies](#) and be sure to follow her [on Twitter](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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