

A different take on communications

 By Jessica Tennant

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ByDesign Communications (ByDesign) is celebrating its first year of business this month and has already won a few awards, including being named the SABRE EMEA Best New PR Consultancy in 2017.

In my interview with co-founder Kevin Welman, he discusses the ever-changing landscape they're operating in and the need to therefore innovate constantly, with their current focus on influencer marketing and social media as well as growing their crisis and content-generation capabilities.



■ ***Congratulations on ByDesign's first anniversary! What did you do to celebrate?***

Thank you. We hold the belief that our staff and clients have been part of our journey. We did something fun and interesting; we made a list of the 60 people who had a massive impact on our business in our first year, and we had 60 limited edition bottles of craft gin made and these were given to staff, clients and partners with a handwritten note, telling them why they are so important to us. It really was a fun exercise telling each person the role they've played in our journey.

■ ***Briefly describe the year; some highlights, some of the work you're particularly proud of, etc.***

We hit the ground running from inception in September: in our first month, we worked on #VaginaVarsity for Net#work BBDO and Libresse; in December, we won a major competitive pitch for a global software brand; and the new year started with a bang winning several more retainer clients, including Agri-Colleges, Adidas, Sovereign Trust and Arton Capital (to name a few). But the highlights include hiring our first person in February, and then hiring someone almost monthly thereafter, moving into our office in February, doubling the size of it in March, and winning two Prism Awards in May, and being awarded as the SABRE EMEA Best New PR Consultancy in 2017.

■ ***Nice! What does winning the latter in your first year of business mean to you and for the company?***

Awards are very important in this industry; the best agencies, the ones winning the pitches, the ones where people want to work seem to be the ones winning the awards. We never thought we would win anything in our first year so the SABRE award was a great surprise. It's great for the team and great for our clients.

■ ***I'm sure you've learnt a number of lessons, both in starting a business and communications company specifically. What has been the most important lesson, in your opinion?***

You must enjoy what you are doing, do it with great people – when something goes wrong, whether it's operational or client-based, solve the problem quickly and move on.

■ ***ByDesign started off claiming to be different... 'Different ByDesign'. What is your competitive advantage/what are your core differentiators?***

As a communications firm, we believe we are different, we have very senior consultants involved in every brief. The agency was born after digital became a thing, so social media (strategy and implementation) is embedded into everything – it's not an afterthought. We can move at pace – we don't need approvals and permissions – we can move at the pace that a client needs – at the pace of a crisis if necessary.

■ ***Comment on the state of the industry, locally and internationally, and how ByDesign is playing in this space and/or is well-positioned to leverage some of the new ways of doing business in the space.***

• ***How has the era of fake news affected this?***

The era of social media has had a greater effect over the last few years. We are a communications firm not a PR agency – we work across platforms, so social media is critical to us. More and more we are seeing the significance of influencers, the role they are playing in consumer marketing, in B2B marketing – the last US elections showed more than ever the role it played in political communications. I believe social media law and fake news will start colliding more and more – dissemination of misinformation must carry repercussions. I believe we are getting there quickly.

• ***How are you innovating, i.e. with regards to your influencer marketing offering?***

I have been surprised at how much of our work is in the influencer space – we are constantly innovating, every day brings new methodologies – in the last month we worked on a major campaign for a major consumer brand where we had to increase views on YouTube user-generated content – it was new, different, but the results were incredible (the results matched the learnings).

■ ***What are you currently working towards?***

We have great clients, but we still have aspirations to grow – within a couple years we want to be recognised as one of the leading agencies in SA or even on the continent – there's much to do. We are growing our crisis capabilities and our content-generation capabilities.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

Jess is Senior Editor: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com. She is also a contributing writer. marketingnews@bizcommunity.com

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