

Meet young judge Monare Matema

 By Jessica Tennant

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In the run-up to the 22nd Prism Awards taking place on Sunday, 14 April, we chatted to this year's cohort of young judges about their fresh approach to the judging process.

In this series of interviews, we find out what they've learnt working alongside the cluster judges and what their young minds bring to the table.

"This year's young judges' entries far exceeded expectation. The selected group is proof that there's an array of diverse and young talent in this industry and that they have a lot to offer," says co-convenor and founder of the Prisms Young Judges initiative, Palesa Madumo, executive director of strategy at Vuma Reputation Management.

Here, our interview with Monare Matema, associate architect at DNA Brand Architects...

■ **What does this recognition and opportunity mean to you?**

The Prism Awards are the country's biggest platform for celebrating excellence in PR and to be one of the lucky few who get to judge the awards means the world to me! I must say that being recognised as a Young Judge at this stage of my career is incredibly humbling. I am encouraged by the fact that the Prisms value young professionals and students and the platform has given me a voice to shape what that excellence looks like. I have had an opportunity to meet some respected industry peers who have already taught me so much and I look forward to more lessons and more learnings as I continue to embark on this journey.

■ **Briefly tell us about your experience in the industry.**

Phew! Where do I even begin? Prior to entering the world of brand communications and PR, I was actually a film major at AFDA (the South African School of Motion Picture and Live Performance). It was there where I got to hone my skills in the art of storytelling, which I got to use in a completely different field when I joined marketing and brand consultancy DNA Brand Architects.

I have been working in the industry for a little over three years now and in that period I have held a number of roles and have literally worked my way up from receptionist to brand assistant and now an associate brand architect. My work has allowed me to occupy the boardrooms of some of the biggest brands in the country, including the likes of Steers, Wimpy, Flying Fish, Lion Lager and Samsung.

Working with a diverse set of brands has taught me so much and allowed me to gain various experiences. I have realised that each brand has its own DNA and as 'brand doctor' that is tasked to solve problems and come up with solutions, it's my job to bring out their brand personality in unique ways that allow for brands to connect more meaningfully with consumers and the media at large. I have also realised how important storytelling is in brand communication and being able to craft great stories for our clients.

■ **Comment on the judging process.**

It's not often that you get to connect with your industry peers so it was really amazing to debate and share ideas with like-



Monare Matema

minded peers both young and old. As a first time judge, I had to ask a lot of questions. What makes a great campaign? What is the measure of a great campaign? Is AVE (advertising value equivalent) still relevant? The list goes on! However, I was surrounded by experienced professionals who were able to guide me through it all but also encourage my independent opinion which was taken into account during the process.

The truth is that PR is changing and this was evident in the work that was coming out.

“ *It's no longer good enough to land press releases in publications and have a great AVE.* ”

Great campaigns need to have a whole lot more than that and I was encouraged by the innovative solutions that agencies are bringing forth for their clients, which are really changing the way we do PR.

■ ***What has the response been to this year's entries?***

There has been an overwhelmingly positive response to this year's entries. The number of entries keeps growing year on year, which says that more and more professionals value the Prisms as a barometer of excellence in the industry. The campaigns are a lot more innovative and there is a concerted effort to not only preserve the intrinsic elements of what makes a great PR campaign but to also push for work that matters. This was very exciting for me as a judge as it says that we are moving to a very exciting space as an industry.

■ ***What makes the winning work stand out?***

For me it is innovation. What makes this campaign different, unique, innovative and effective are the questions I found myself asking during the judging process. I was particularly intrigued by work which exuded that 'X factor'. It can at times be intangible but when you see it you see it! It's a perfect combination of all things and then some! That's what I was looking for when judging the entries and that's what I believe makes winning works stand out.

■ ***Prisa also introduced the Student Campaign of the Year in 2016. Why do you think it's important that PR students are included in such initiatives?***

I think it's so important to expose students early on in their career to what makes a great campaign. The Student of the Year Award gives students something to work towards before they enter the industry and when they eventually do enter the industry, they are already exposed to a higher standard of excellence. One can only imagine what a Student Campaign of the Year win will do for their career. This will expose them to better job opportunities and allow them to be more intentional in the work they do and students are the future so we better show them some respect!

■ ***What do you think young minds bring to the table?***

So much!

“ *I love calling myself the voice of the millennial in the boardroom because I feel that we are not as well represented as we should be and I want to change this.* ”

As young minds we understand the desires of the youth, what their interests and passions are and who influences and inspires them. This is so important when it comes to PR and the campaigns that we do for our clients as we are able to make campaigns more relatable and authentic for young people. Our voice really does matter!

■ ***What have you learnt working alongside the cluster judges?***

Oh wow, I had amazing cluster judges and what was great is that my cluster was well balanced with judges that came from the client side and agency side. This exposed me to what clients want from a campaign but also what agencies think makes a great campaign, which was really interesting.

I learnt that we can't only look at campaigns from a point of view of ticking boxes, we need to be a lot more holistic in our approach in interrogating whether the campaign actually deserves to be in the category it was entered. Do they understand the client's objectives and the nature of the industry? What research was applied before the campaign was executed? How

well were they able to meet the mandate of their objectives in measuring their results? We had a lot of back-and-forths on this but I must say what they really taught me is that everyone's opinion matters and we need to take that into account when judging.

■ **Comment on the past, present and future state of PR.**

The past has been great, however, I won't dwell on it too much as I believe that you are only as good as your next job. What I would like to focus on is the current state of PR and the future.

The industry is changing and I think that is something that many professionals are becoming more and more aware of. Trends are great and we see a lot of that within the industry. However, we need to focus on sustainable solutions that are going to move the industry and our clients forward and not dwell on how well things worked in the past.

If I am to hold a mirror ball into the future, I see digital, social media, content and artificial intelligence playing a stronger role and we need to be able to embrace these new methods of communication and be flexible to change if PR is still going to be relevant. So, let's be willing to learn new things but also willing to unlearn what we have learnt in the past. This for me makes the future so exciting!

■ **What would the title of Prisms Young Judge for the 2019 awards mean to you?**

It has already meant so much to me! I have been working towards this moment for the past couple of years and the fact that it has come to fruition this year is absolutely magical! What it means to me is that my voice in the industry matters. What I think, what I say and how I contribute matters. It truly is a privilege to call myself a 'PYJ'. There's a lot of exciting things you guys are going to see coming from the Prism Young Judges this year and I can't wait to play a part in taking it to the next level.

■ **What are you most looking forward to in terms of this year's Awards?**

To be honest I am really looking forward to being in a space where I am surrounded by the best of the best in the industry. I mean the Prism Awards is the biggest celebration of PR excellence in the country, so I am looking forward to the people I am going to meet, the connections I am going to make, the conversations I am going to share and the wins I am going to celebrate. Because when you are surrounded by the best you become the best and I have a strong feeling it's going to be a good year!

That's a wrap of this year's Prism Young Judges' interviews and as mentioned the Awards take place this Sunday, 14 April. Follow us on [Twitter](#) for live updates on the night and visit our [Prism Awards special section](#) for other related content and of course all the winners following the announcement. Here's the link to our other [social media](#) pages, as well as the Prism Awards' [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts.

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