

The award show with purpose

 By Ann Nurock

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In this exclusive interview I speak to Kevin Swanepoel, CEO of the One Club and One Show Awards taking place in New York City this week, about what true diversity means in terms of both gender and race throughout the industry.

Nurock: It's an absolute privilege to be interviewing you Kevin, because not only are you the CEO of the One Club but also a South African. When did you leave South Africa?



Kevin Swanepoel

Swanepoel: Thanks Ann. Firstly, I'm thrilled to have you here for the South Africans, and to see the great work that's going to be displayed during our Creative Week. I came to the US 19 years ago in 1998, to start the Interactive Award Show here. At that stage I'd come from Apple and we were working on a thing called the internet, and I said to [Mary Warlick](#), who was then the head of the One Show that we should do an interactive award show. I outlined that for her, she put it forward to the board, and they said 'Great idea, now you've got to get this guy to come out here and do it because we don't know anything about him.' That's the journey of how I got here.

Nurock: There are a lot of award shows around globally and in the US. What is about the One Show Awards that is different to other awards

Swanepoel: There are two fundamental differences. The one is with awards that are [not-for-profit](#) like ourselves, that look to do good for the industry. So agencies enter, they pay a fee to have their work reviewed, and if they're good enough they win an award and then that fund is used to actually better the industry. We put it back into [diversity, like with the workshops and boot camps](#) we held down in Cape Town last year, and we put it back into professional development with other workshops we offer the industry, as well as scholarships. We give out about \$36,000 in scholarships a year to students who are on the up-and-coming. The one in South of France is very much on that scale, but D&AD and ourselves are definitely not-for-profit.

The other big difference that sets us apart from other award shows is that we really believe the One Show is the fairest award out there. It's the most prestigious award, and when I say 'fair' I mean we limit discussion and don't allow lobbying, so we cut out a lot of the issues that other award shows have. To keep it fair, every piece of work gets seen, every piece of work gets judged, and if it doesn't meet the criteria for a category we move it; we don't just disqualify work. We really believe our process is very fair.

Nurock: You seem to focus a lot on diversity, which is a very important need in the industry globally, especially in the US and obviously South Africa. Talk to me about the focus of diversity that you have with the One Show Awards.

Swanepoel: For us, we believe that creative departments in our industry should be made up like the industry we serve. In other words, if our consumers out there are a mix of both gender and race, our creative departments should mirror that. It doesn't make any sense if it's just a bunch of guys in the creative department who are then creating ads for women, it also doesn't make sense if there's a bunch of white people creating ads for Latinos or blacks. The creative department should reflect, and it's not just diversity in race, but it's diversity in gender as well. For the Young Ones Awards, the one brief was for gender equality. We see this throughout the organisation, whether it's coming up through the Young Ones, we push really hard to get young people, both male and female, credited, we try keep our jury – it's really difficult to get a really top jury that is 50/50 and we have a lot of women and a lot of diversity on our jury – so we don't just pay this lip service.

Instead we take some of the revenue we generate and we do boot camps, we'll be back in Cape Town this year and we're also coming to Johannesburg for a boot camp down there. We do this in 3 countries and 12 cities.

Nurock: The '3%' of creative directors globally being female, is a concern. Why do you think that is?

Swanepoel: Some people are obviously pushing to have more women in management, in creative roles, but there's also a whole other bunch of people that are pushing to have more African Americans, Hispanics and people of various races. So there's two sides to these serious diversity issues. The one is gender equality and the other is racial equality. Cindy and the team at 3 Percent Conference are doing a pretty good job at trying to give more women great exposure. There really are great women, to be honest I think they just need to be a little more forthcoming and forward themselves, because we've had competitions for young professionals, and young students, and I can tell you that when you go to the art colleges, there are about 70% women and about 30% guys – maybe it's 60/40 but when it's gets to the industry, the guys are the ones who dominate. When we have the One to Watch competition, which is for people under the age of 30, we have teamed up with Cindy and 3% Conference, [SheSays USA](#), [SheSays London](#), to try and get more women to enter. But for some reason, less women enter and I just don't get it. If women want to start dominating, and have a bigger presence within the agencies, then they really should try and participate more. They've definitely got the cred, ability and talent.

When I see some of the art directors, young creative and writers coming out of colleges, they've got all the talent in the world. But for some reason they don't have that raw push that guys have got. The guys are a little bit more dominant, and I just think that women have got to get a little bit hungry.

Nurock: So at the end of the event on Friday night, what will success look like for you? What would you like to have achieved?

Swanepoel: Well I know what success looks like for a couple of agencies because I know the results! But to be frank with you, success for me is that it already is way beyond my wildest dreams. We sold out Wednesday night's One Show Awards 8 days before the event and Thursday, we have a star-studded line-up, with David Droga doing the keynote and about 150 amazing speakers. Then on Friday night, we are going to be having sit-down dinner for about 900 people and I can tell you, being a South African who really loves meat, I have got the best restaurant in New York City serving the best steaks, so you can be guaranteed to feel at home and success will be when you sit down and watch some amazing work, and dine one of the finest meals in New York City.

Nurock: Kevin thank you so much, it's an absolute privilege to be here, representing Bizcommunity, and I'm really looking forward to the week ahead.

One Show Creative Week runs from 9 to 13 May 2016. Click through to our [One Show awards](#) special section and watch for live coverage of the One Show Creative Week from me, roving reporter, [Ann Nurock](#).

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