

Branding battle plans revealed

Late last week, five of the top South African youth brands shared how they were able to stand out and prevail in the most difficult economic climate in 30 years to a panel of advertising and marketing gurus at The Journal, a mega brand forum of Jeremy Maggs and *The Sunday Times* Generation Next Survey.



The brands, Nike South Africa, Coca-Cola, Samsung, DStv's Trace music channel and DJ Cleo, described as Generation Next's coolest local celebrity, faced media and marketing commentator, Jeremy Maggs; Enver Groenewald, GM of advertising revenue and strategic communications at Avusa Media; Jonathan Cherry, founder of Cherryflava and chair of Yellowwood Future Architects, Andy Rice.

Some of these top five South African brands have been consecutive winners at *The Sunday Times* Generation Next Awards over the years and each seems to have one thing in common: they have won the hearts of young consumers through their brands' association with the youth lifestyle. The number one take out from this year's survey was that music is by far the single biggest driver of self-expression in the youth market.

Passion

One of the key insights is that these brands' involvement with the right music, sport, celebrities and athletes play an imperative role in building brand-consumer relationships. The common distinguishing attribute, however, that each of the brand ambassadors has is a complete and utter passion for their brand and their consumers.

Brand story, content is king

Each brand had five minutes to share its brand story ahead of facing the panel and first was Mark Kronenberg, vice president of Cheil Worldwide South Africa, who spoke about Samsung's focus on hardware and product superiority. According to him, content is still king and, although it is free, viewing content in the best format requires superior technology, which Samsung provides.

Samsung, the fastest growing brand since 2003 in terms of rand value, walked away with coolest computer brand at [this year's Awards](#) because of the youth market's association of the brand with its range of plasma screen televisions. According to [HDI Youth Marketers'](#) managing director Jason Levin, youngsters think the Samsung plasma screens are cool and, when that association is clear, the whole brand is acknowledged.

The endorsement of Samsung's cellphone products by 'cool' icons like singer Beyonce and Ivorian footballer Didier Drogba also highlights the importance of a brand entrenching itself in what this market classifies as cool.

Local is lekker

One of the new categories in this year's survey was 'coolest local celebrity'. In the past, this question was phrased as 'coolest celebrity' but international icons always came out on top. Local DJs made a clean sweep of the new category, showing that, when the youth think of celebrities they don't think of actors or sports stars; their instinctive response is repeatedly, a musician. Once again, music is undoubtedly the most important interest and pastime in the lives of the younger generations.

DJ Cleo believes that what differentiates him from other musicians are his personality, image and comical music videos. His marketing strategy is a modest one. "I keep it real, honest and simple, which is an effective approach for this market as they can smell a 'formal marketing strategy' from a mile off and are never easily swayed by those."

Just do it goes to the street

Originally, a traditional sportswear brand, in recent years the sports store Nike has been making a move towards street fashion. This move and the brand's association with music have shifted it into the fashion category and this year it took the title of coolest fashion label.

The significant brand characteristics that keep it relevant and at number one are its coolness and youth and its dedication to cutting-edge product innovation. The brand also provides a flawless retail experience that lives and breathes consumers' lifestyles.

"Someone working here shouldn't be spending 80% of the time at the desk. My desk doesn't talk to me. I need to be listening and observing my consumers before my competitors do," says Nike brand director, Mzamo Masito.

On the journey to and during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the brand made a conscious strategic decision to spend money on great athletes and great consumer and retail experiences than on sponsorships.

Music is visual

Musician and brand ambassador for Trace (DSTV channel 325), Jimmy Muteba, was up next to represent the coolest TV channel overall and coolest music channel. Only two years old in 2009, Trace overtook MTV. Insights drawn from the survey indicate that, "Trace got the formula right. The channel provides the right music - and just music," says Groenewald.

The content on the channel is 99% music videos. Trace has a young, passionate scheduling team made up of music lovers from all over Africa, who are in touch with what their consumers really want. According to Muteba, its secret to its success is its investment in brand awareness and quality programming.

Always the brand

Last, but not least, Coca-Cola's Zayd Abrahams took the podium to share his passion for and commitment to South Africa's favourite brand. Coca-Cola maintained its number one position for the third year in a row as both the coolest brand overall and the coolest cold drink at the Awards. The stalwart of the soft drinks industry has tapped into every element of a young person's life. What has become obvious, after years of continuous success, is that Coca-Cola is more than just a product, it's a way of life. The brand's communications emphasise the brand experience rather than the product alone. Its association with music has also been part of its success among South African youth.

"We are about refreshment but are far beyond refreshment. We are a 125-year-old brand that is a teenager at heart -

today, yesterday and forever," says Abrahams.

"The brand is not only about owning everyday experiences, but also owning once-in-a-lifetime experiences for our consumers. It is essential for us to drill down and find those insightful connection points. It's those connections that keep us at number one," he concludes.

The forum was a success with attendees getting a clear understanding of what is really behind South Africa's award-winning youth brands.

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