BIZCOMMUNITY

King James Group drinks in their global win

By Leigh Andrews

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King James Group's chief creative officer Alistair King says the time when independent local agencies couldn't really expect to work in international brands because of how multinationals tied up the brands at a global level are over.



King James Group's chief creative officer Alistair King

Earlier today, news broke that King James Group has been appointed to manage AB InBev's global brands in South Africa.

Alistair King, chief creative officer of the King James Group described the three-way pitch process to me as a **good old-fashioned shootout**: "A simple brief on a single brand – best agency on the day to win." He says that's not always the way they like it, but obviously they are thrilled that this time they did well enough to be picked.

They felt the pitch had gone well at the time, so were quietly feeling optimistic. But of course, that optimism slowly wanes with each day that goes by without a phone call. Luckily that call finally came through on Wednesday morning.

King says, "We immediately went and bought 200 of the beers we'd be working on and broke the news to our team. For various reasons, our team in Johannesburg only got to celebrate the news this morning so I'm guessing the pub opened early there today."

That celebration is much-deserved, especially as they'll give these global iconic brands local relevance once they've immersed themselves in them. But King says, "Local relevance is sometimes as simple as the brand just looking and behaving like a long-standing citizen of this country."

King also responded to a handful of Qs below…

There's a little irony in this win as the King James Group was founded on a liquor brand....

Yes our first brand was Cape Velvet Cream, awarded to us by what was then Gilbeys SA, and it literally funded our first two members of staff. Our first ad ever was a full-page newspaper ad that proudly carried the key line 'King James 0000001'. We were thinking big at the time. Later in our first year we won Bell's Scotch Whisky and later Johnnie Walker, which we are presently parting company with, 19 years later. This obviously heralds a new chapter for us and we now get to throw our experience and energy into a brand-new relationship and some pretty remarkable brands. We're highly, highly motivated, that's for sure.

What are you then most looking forward to, from working with the global AB InBev team?

Everything about it is exciting. It's a new relationship, a new energy. It's a new era for our agency group. A lot of beer will no doubt be involved. The brands are simply magnificent and the client is looking for powerful integrated solutions, which is where our sweet spot is. We fully intend and expect to do great work with this team.

What does this global win mean for an independent local agency like yourselves?

There was a time when independent agencies couldn't really expect to work in international brands because of how multinationals tied up the brands at a global level. Many marketers felt they were being forced into arranged marriages, so in time more and more of them were given the freedom to choose the agencies they wished to work with.



A view of independent agencies in South Africa

César Vacchiano 4 Apr 2017

That's when we first got our hands onto some global brands – Levi's, Mini, Johnnie Walker, Parmalat, to name a few. As an independent we are not particularly threatening to any of the global networks when we work with them and so it's proven to be very easy for us. Wins like this are very satisfying because they simply affirm that we are doing world-class stuff.

Keep an eye out for more on that world-class work and be sure to follow the King James Group on Twitter.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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