Insight-driven sports marketing excellence with Playmakers

By Leigh Andrews

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Playmakers, the local sports marketing agency, was recently awarded in the Clio Sports Awards' 'Partnerships, Sponsorships & Endorsements category' in New York - the first SA agency honoured with this win. Just ahead of the Discovery Sport Industry Awards tomorrow evening, CEO Richard Dunn explains their role as a sport agency in the sponsorship media space and how they bring the worlds of sponsorship, marketing and business together in a dynamic and creative way.

While the Clio Sports Award is a country-first, it's by no means Playmakers' first accolade. In fact, locally they've been picking up awards from the get-go as Dunn explains they were Discovery's SA Sport Agency of the Year from 2013 to 2016 and were awarded the title of Financial Mail's AdFocus Specialist Agency of the Year for 2015, among others.



Playmakers becomes first SA agency to win at Clio Sports Awards

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Dunn adds that sports marketing as a medium is one of the fastest-moving industries and is evolving so quickly, with different moving parts. Ultimately, Playmakers tries to maximise the commercial opportunities for clients around their sponsorship properties, having a strong marketing-led approach and then joining the dots better between the different consumer touch points, so sponsorship is ultimately just another communication medium.

Dunn says, "That is why we need to make sure we understand consumer insights, deliver differentiated thinking and execute campaigns well for our clients."

Clearly they've mastered these skills. Here, Dunn lets us in on that Clio-winning work as well as how SA awards differ from global recognition, the stand-out factors of sponsorship in South Africa as a whole and a few of the key lessons learned over Playmakers' 16 years of operation.

Congrats again on your recent Clio Awards win! Share the crux of your winning campaign for Coca-Cola #ThatsGold @SuperSportTV.

Thanks! We are delighted with winning at the Clio Sports Awards in New York and being the first South African agency to do so.

The campaign revolved around creating a series of "live" commercials around the Olympic Games last year, where fans determined the content of eight commercials through social media conversation. It was an insight-driven campaign to uplift fans and allow them to celebrate their golden moments around the Olympic Games.

The campaign culminated in in a two-minute theme piece, which featured all of the South African medal moments. This Coca-Cola campaign was about client, agency and media owner being aligned in terms of trying to deliver on differentiated thinking.

How do the SA awards Playmakers has received over the years differ from global recognition like this from the Clios?

The local awards feel bigger because we often have a large team including clients joining us at the awards ceremonies and we can celebrate together, but we know that ultimately we need to judge ourselves against the best in the world, and that is why the Clio Sports Award will stand out as it is global recognition. We have had recognition from Coca-Cola globally around this campaign and this is important as we've also recently been awarded some global charters to lead for them, so winning a global award vindicates their decision to back us as an agency. We need to evaluate ourselves against the best in the world and the Clios allows us to do that.


Playmakers CEO, Richard Dunn.

- ***Share a few more of your personal highlights over the course of the company's impressive history.***

It is over 16 years since we started Playmakers in Cape Town. The first six years were difficult, like any business we made mistakes but certainly learnt through this process. For me the first real highlight was getting our first stature client in Castle Lager and their investment around the Springboks in 2003, as landing that kind of client made people look at us a little differently. From there we have managed to build on the momentum, attract the best talent to our business and do great work. We have the best people the the best clients that include Absa, Barclays, Coca-Cola, KFC, Adidas, Pernod Ricard, Land Rover and Jaguar. Winning each new client is a highlight.



The Playmakers agency.

In terms of awards, winning the Discovery Sport Agency of the Year for the last four consecutive years has been massively rewarding, but I believe the different awards we have won with all our clients for actual campaign work over the years has probably given me personally more satisfaction.

- ***Talk us through sponsorship as a whole and how it differs – both for better and worse – in SA compared to the rest of the globe.***

For better: We are not often as regulated as the rest of the world, which allows us to be more creative in how we can execute around sponsorships.

For worse: In our country things are very political, so sometimes that lens plays a bigger part than a marketing lens in the way you approach things. This can be frustrating as ultimately we are just another marketing medium and we would prefer to just apply marketing principles to why we do certain things, but that is often not the case.

- ***What can we expect from the Discovery Sport Industry Awards tomorrow night? What's their impact on the***

industry?

We need a platform like the advertising, digital and social industries to celebrate the innovative work that our industry does, and the Discovery Sport Industry Awards are exactly that. The Sport Industry Group started the awards in London and launched the annual South African version around the 2010 Fifa World Cup, so this platform is massively important to our whole industry. There will be over 1,000 people attending the event, which will be held at the Sandton Convention Centre. This is a great night for all agencies, rights holders, media owners and clients. These awards have helped us position ourselves in the industry and we are grateful to everyone who participates in and organises the event.

We're looking forward to the results! Visit the Playmakers press office and follow them and Dunn on Twitter for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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