

Rapt Creative: Building while the ship is sailing

By  [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Independent agency, Rapt Creative, went into the pandemic as a known activation and experiential type of agency but emerged with a stronger offering, catapulting it into the creative agency arena.



Image supplied. Marco Santarelli, partner creative and strategy at Rapt: "It is only by walking the journey with the client that you can keep your clients, regardless of the circumstances"

Its transformation has been so successful that at the end of last year, the agency was crowned the *Financial Mail* AdFocus Awards Small Agency of the Year 2021, beating out some well-known and well-established agencies.

“During Covid-19 and the lockdowns, we always looked ahead of the curve as we knew if we just navigated our way through the pandemic years, things would change, and then when they did, we would be ready,” says Marco Santarelli, partner creative and strategy at Rapt.

When adversity strikes everyone in the industry knows that the first thing that gets cut is the marketing budget. The agency understood that but also how the converse is true: that is when the world returned to some sort of normality, marketing needs would increase again.

Staying connected with clients

The agency realised now was the time to stay close to its clients. “At the end of the pandemic we knew there would be a big gap in the market to fill and clients would need a trusted partner to do this,” adds Santarelli.

And so Rapt stayed connected with its clients regardless of their circumstances. “It was a true partnership that led to the formation of a solid foundation that spoke volumes when we emerged from the pandemic.”



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Hiring great talent

Concurrently, while many agencies were letting people go, Rapt was hiring. With many people being retrenched a pool of really great talent was suddenly available.

Garreth van Vuuren, founding managing director, saw past the adversity and hired ahead and found the right talent as he knew that having a great core team would help the agency get through to the other side.

This strategy has served Rapt well and the agency has gained even more momentum since then leading to constant growth for the past two years.

From a business strategy, overcoming challenges, being very strategic and ambitious, the trusted relationships the agency formed during the pandemic led to not only the growth of its business and its increased offerings but also increased the portfolios of its clients.

While doing good for people in the industry during tough times has spoken volumes as well, leaving the agency with great talent within its four walls.

A new type of agency: Non-traditional, even a bit rebellious

The agency counts its youthfulness (no legacy issues) and its independence (not being owned by an international body) as advantageous in the industry as it stands today. It allows them be agile when it matters so the agency can shift and change as it needs to.

“We can reset quickly - what we did yesterday can be a thing of the past, as we try or do a new way for whatever reason, for example, a change in the external environment. And we can do so instantly.

“We have always been hungry, and that has not changed. It drives us, makes us non-traditional, even a bit rebellious in the way we approach things,” says Santarelli.

He adds that this agility together with the hunger of the agency means they can tackle whatever hits them whenever they need to quickly.

“Legacy agencies have the credentials to do what they are known for and comfortable with; it’s not always easy for them to change.”

In contrast, Rapt is building while the ship is sailing.



#BehindtheSelfie: Marco Santarelli, strategy partner at Rapt Creative

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Somewhere in between the bad and good

“It’s an exciting time because the old way of working must be reset or refreshed. As an industry everyone has learned from the pandemic and while we have stabilised and the world has become a little bit more normalised, you cannot ever forget that this could happen again or that anything can happen,” he says.

But he adds that they have learnt ways of working and how to get through any situation, if it were to arise, a lot quicker and better.

He quantifies the current situation as being “somewhere in between the bad and good”, with agencies nowhere near where they came from. For example, clients are taking business in-house, so he says agencies are fighting among their own clients for business.

But by the same token, he adds that good has come out of this. “Clients have realised that they actually need agencies to help them solve their internal problems to help them come out of the last few years.

“Previously you had a retainer and serviced your client. Today you have to be more hungry and proactive in showing clients stuff they did not even think they needed. You have to be a valued supplier, not just a paid one.”

A partnership

The biggest element of their success is that they have a partnership with their clients.

“It’s a very human thing and you walk that journey together doing the best you can together, because you are together, not because you are being renumerated at the end of the day.

“It is only by walking the journey with the client that you can keep your clients, regardless of the circumstances,” he says.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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