

Revealed: The secret behind Grid's 'brand creation and refresh' success

 By Leigh Andrews 6 Nov 2014

Nathan Reddy and Adam Byars of Grid Worldwide are big on improving customer experience and training design newbies... that may just be why they keep bringing home big awards.



You need to adequately prepare yourself for a chat with Nathan Reddy and Adam Byars of Grid, which stands for 'Gavin Reddy Identity', as they are positively popping with enthusiasm for local design and enhancing its overall status...

■ *On a personal level, tell us about your individual careers and how you came together to form Grid*

Reddy: My career spans such legendary agencies as FCB, TBWA/Hunt/Lascaris, and DDB SA. I was also founding member of TBWA/Gavin/Reddy and Grid, where I remain today. Looking back on the years, which include the acknowledgement of 65 awards, I feel much has been done to keep the standard of South African design ahead of the curve. We should never say we're good enough in an attempt to keep growing, and continue pushing the quality of good work in South Africa.

Byars: My career's not been as glamorous as Nathan's. I have a strong entrepreneurial background, and played around with life skills & image consulting, which was tough, then I moved into the tobacco industry for eight years before moving to the agency side, but it was all below-the-line (BTL) with none of the glamour of ATL awards. I then moved to Middle East for a few years heading up a big automobile division for TBWA, moving back to South Africa four years ago, meeting the Grid team shortly after returning and it's been a happy marriage ever since!

■ *Talk us through how you founded The South African Graphic Design Council (THINK), now Brand Council SA, and the importance of this for the industry*

Reddy: Well, I hold a National Diploma in graphic design, and with my 15-year track record in graphic design, I noticed there wasn't a real voice for local graphic design. I thus formed the Think Council aimed at promoting the best design and enhancing the profession as a whole, which evolved into [Brand Council South Africa](#).

■ *Explain your involvement in the Creative Circle, and Creative Circle's role in the SA advertising industry*

Reddy: With my advertising and graphic design background, I technically fall into both industries, so it's important for me to overlook both. Luckily this is possible with my link to the Brand Council SA for graphic design and the Creative Circle for advertising. The benefit for today's world is that it enhances the overall communications industry in South Africa, helping us punch above our weight.

■ *Talk us through the state of the local advertising awards industry...*

Reddy: Systematically, South Africa's confidence level in its creative work is not the highest it could be. It's only when South Africans venture outside our borders that they realise how potentially amazing we are. The industry needs a confidence boost and reminder that we do actually produce some of the best work, of world-class calibre.

■ *How are you personally attempting to transform the design industry in South Africa?*



Adam Byars

Reddy and Byars: Through a new initiative called the Grid Foundation, we are looking to understand the younger generation and equip them with the skills they need. In particular, they need help from the industry in understanding brand design. This also goes back to doing something for the industry itself. This helps us create a nice umbrella of education and talent growth. We want to give back as we are patriotic and proud of our country. We'll be executing the Foundation in the next year, with the Grid Academy as a core focus. We are looking to take on roughly 30 students based on students, who are currently learning, as well as our own staff and entrepreneurial start-ups, as well as educating our clients on how agencies think and operate. This relationship is often strained due to lack of understanding on both sides, so we'd hopefully be able to untangle and smooth things over.

■ ***Moving on to Grid - what's the basic work flow or creative process in the agency?***

Reddy and Byars: For us, it's all about 'think, feel, do'. We do work out an exact process and drill down into what happens. But we work it out with each client specifically so there isn't a cookie cutter template we slot into. Some clients require more research than others, so it boils down to having a conversation about what the client wants. So while each client's needs are tailored to differently front of house, a clear system or framework exists back of house in Grid. Our secret weapon is that we're confident in what we do. It's intuitive and instinctive, as creativity's built into our DNA.

■ ***Explain Grid's philosophy that "The world doesn't need another brand. #make it mean something"?***

Reddy and Byars: We base it on the need to clearly understand why people want to do what they do. It's not just about ticking boxes. In communication, it's all about slotting into a category. Ultimately, all clients want to be seen and known for what they do. What I feel about a brand. It's all about the power of branding, no matter how big or small the company.

■ ***Now explain Grid's strategy***

Reddy and Byars: Our strategy as a business is on our core offering. We have to work with experts in certain specialised fields of expertise, but to go forward with our core team we have a fixed resource model and collaborate to reach best of breed in achieving best practice. To drive success into 2015 we're looking at becoming faster and more agile through better service delivery to the market. We don't have just one specific focus, but rather an overarching brand focus that provides meaning. In the last two years we've added FNB, Liberty and Sasol to our list of blue chip clients including: ACSA, SA Tourism, Brand South Africa, Ster-Kinekor, MTN, Virgin Mobile, Lulu's coffee shop, Exclusive Books, Virgin Mobile, YFM and the ICC Cricket World Cup. We aim to give meaning to the market by making consumers feel a certain way.

■ ***Talk us through Grid receiving the top Loeries accolade as well as medals and a certificate for Anti-Est's 'What is this bespoke space' in Braamfontein, Johannesburg and how does it celebrate new design and display thinking while earning a commercial return?***



Nathan Reddy

Reddy and Byars: Yes, we were awarded the third Grand Prix award at this year's Loeries Awards for client Anti-Est's #Unlearn campaign in the Design Mixed Medium category. If you've not been to Braamfontein recently, you'd be surprised

The Braamfontein of today is a network, much like Yeoville was 20 years ago, with a proper nucleus. It's not trying to be cool, it just is. We wanted to celebrate that feeling and philosophy. The best way to do so was to get people to 'unlearn'. That was the driving force in creating the philosophy and movement. Once people started to cotton on to what was being said about it, they start to question the status quo. So Anti-Est wasn't just another cool place - it's done really well on social media. The commercial return has been amazing, and Anti-Est is now more than just a place to eat and drink, it crosses borders.

▣ ***What's next for Grid?***

Reddy and Byars: We're definitely looking at geo-expansion. While Johannesburg has always been good for us as a base and we've worked well across borders, we've strived to 'get things right in our own house' before refocusing our sights. We had success in Cape Town as it's so creative and also in the Middle East. The way we work as an agency works well over there. We also approach Africa itself as a different market, and have a number of opportunities for expansion outside South Africa. As [part of the TBWA network](#) we constantly have interesting conversations and need to stick to what we believe in. Going into 2015 we have a number of exciting new clients coming on board in the technology and petroleum space and we're involved in branding the nation - it's a consolidated effort.

▣ ***What trends do you see as the biggest to come in 2015?***

Reddy and Byars: In communication, people want to experience a brand, and we focus on what people feel. We're spoiled for choice, and therefore need to understand how to make a conversation more relevant, it's tough as there's just so much out there. We'll see renewed focus on what to do to meet these needs in 2015.

Seems GRID's one to keep an eye on in 2015 with their shift towards focusing on how consumers feel in 2015, as they were ranked second in this year's Communication Design table from the Loeries Ranking, so clearly they're on the right track.

[Click here](#) for more on Grid.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of inclusion, belonging, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! Now follow her travel adventures on YouTube @MidlifeMeander.
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