

How Sanlam took the top spot - again

 By Leigh Andrews

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The Sanlam marketing team has had an exceptionally good year, coming out as top brand in the latest Loeries Rankings. Alistair King, CCO of agency King James Group and Mariska Oosthuizen, head of brand for Sanlam, explain how they got to that top spot for the second time in four years.



Oosthuizen and King.

Ever wondered about the work that goes into a successful ad agency-marketing brand relationship? Who better to ask than those behind the work that saw Sanlam top this year's Loeries Rankings table? Not only that – Oosthuizen herself also scooped the slot for best brand representative.

Here, King and Oosthuizen share the behind-the-scenes work that got them to that top spot, as well as how to keep that working relationship running smoothly, and the industry relationship they personally admire...

 ***Congrats on your top brand ranking at the Loeries ranking this year! Talk us through how you claimed that spot again.***

King: It was a cracker year for us and an extraordinary team effort. And yes, it's the second time in four years that Sanlam has topped the brand ranking at Loeries.



2-Minute Shower Songs.

Five different Sanlam campaigns won 17 awards, including a Grand Prix and four Golds. Of course, Sanlam Two-minute Showers was our main winner on the night, but this wasn't a clean sweep by a one-off stroke of magic.



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All five campaigns were contenders, which just reassures me that our creative bar is very high across the board, and that warms my heart immensely.

“I'm particularly thrilled that all five campaigns were primarily digital and integrated campaigns, which put us at the top of the digital agency ranking. That has been a huge goal and is affirmation that our evolution as an agency is paying off.”

King: It's been a huge year for us, particularly because we've spent most of it producing brand work to celebrate Sanlam's 100th year. But our Whatsapp Drama, Uk'shona Kwelanga, finally got the accolades it deserved by winning two Silver Lions at Cannes, two Creative Circle Ads of the Year and two golds at the Bookmarks.



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Sanlam Two-minute Showers won Prism PR Campaign of the Year and a handful of One Show Pencils, so we have felt like we're styling this year, all with work that is decidedly very South African.

■ **There's no denying the client-agency relationship is an important factor in getting out work that works. Comment on your working relationship together and how you keep things running smoothly.**

King: Everyone remembers winning Sanlam. It was the start of a massive reconfiguration of our studio and our very model of working.

“ There was no pitch – we were offered it uncontested, based largely on the work we had done for Santam over the previous years. We hit the ground running, repositioned and relaunched them in four months, which is usually what it takes to conduct a pitch process. ”

We literally threw the client and ourselves into uncharted territory from the get-go with work like the One Rand Man, and the intensity of the account has not waned since.



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It's very simple for me: The client either shares your appetite to create remarkable work, or they don't. And if they don't, you and the work are on a hiding to nowhere.

This might sound obvious, but it's crazy how many marketers are afraid to put a foot wrong. Innovative work, by its very nature, requires trying something new, taking a chance here and there, and Sanlam has always had that eagerness to go where other brands haven't gone in a creative sense.



One Rand Man.

I think the perfect client-agency relationship is when both share the same level of creative ambition for the brand, and will both give their all to make it something special.

Oosthuizen: We've been working with King James since 2014, the year we repositioned Sanlam as Wealthsmiths. We have a good relationship, but like with any relationship things, are not always moonshine and roses.

We have, however, always managed to find our way through the rocky times and have consistently created standout

creative work. I sometimes think a bit of friction isn't a bad thing. Like Bruce Springsteen says, "you can't start a fire without a spark."



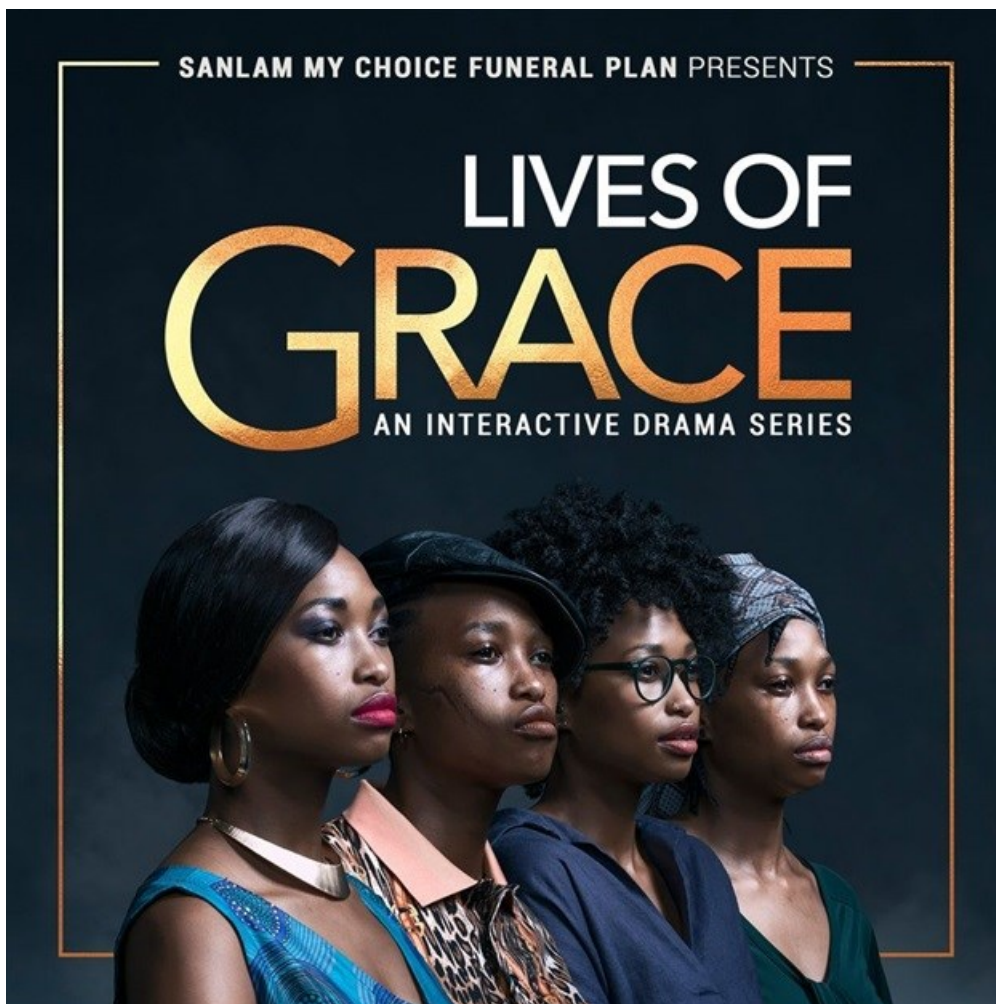
UK'Shona KweLanga.

I attribute our success to the fact that both parties are passionate about the brand, believe in the power of creative ideas and have a respect for the contribution the other party makes.

▣ ***Advice on what brands and agencies alike can do to ensure a better working relationship?***

King: By my definition, a good working relationship is when the work that is produced is excellent, not when everyone is all Kumbaya. Look, I'd prefer it if it was all Kumbaya, but that's not really how great advertising works.

In my experience, if there's no friction, someone is not pushing hard enough and so, every now and then we have to sit down with the Sanlam team, have a laugh and a few tequilas, and forgive each other for the stress of the previous few months.



Lives of Grace.

It's not necessarily healthy, but its damn effective, and when the work is great, relationships have a funny way of just cementing.

“ If I had to give one piece of advice it would be this: Look at what your competitors are doing, and don't do that: do it differently and do it better, and do it with more ambition. No one breaks newground with cautious, incremental steps. When you raise the bar, you competitors have to raise their bar – that's how entire categories are lifted from the mundane mass of work that exists out there. ”



Mna Nam

Oosthuizen: Again, it's just like any relationship. Ever heard of the 'hiccup' principle?

- **H:** Be Honest
- **I:** intellectual compatibility is important – you need to be aligned in terms of values and thinking
- The big **C:** Communicate, communicate, communicate
- The small **c:** Compromise – meet each other half way
- **U:** Understanding, there's always two sides of any story
- **P:** Patience - respect each other, and sometimes bite your tongue

■ **Love that. Let's end by spreading more love: Which 'industry relationship' do you most admire, and why?**

King: I'm not going to dare to presume the health of another agency's relationship with its client, but I do respect a marketer that doesn't change their agency every four years because of a procurement mandate.



The Family Fortune.

It's no surprise that we are in our fifth year with Sanlam, and doing our best work ever. But Volkswagen remains the gold standard in this regard.

I do like the film work being done on Chicken Licken and KFC at the moment. I'd love to get my agency into the 'chicken wars'. I do love a good brand-scrap!

Oosthuizen: I would say some of the longer-standing ones, like that of VW and Ogilvy Cape Town. They've been together for as long as I can remember – and that's a long time – and they still manage to consistently deliver amazing work.

There's definitely a special magic that comes from working well together. See examples of Sanlam's work with King James Group below, click through to our [Loeries special section](#) for more, and follow [King James Group](#) and [Sanlam](#) on Twitter for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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