

Sarah-Jane Boden, "no one needs to get left behind"

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Sarah-Jane Boden, a strategic and cultural advisor, chats to us about being on the judging panel in the Events and PR category at [Loeries 2021](#).



Sarah-Jane Boden, a strategic and cultural advisor

■ *How do you feel about judging at this year's Loeries?*

It was very interesting to see the overwhelming number of entries from brands and organisations tackling social justice issues such as LGBTQIA+, GBV, gender and even inequality. This shows that a lot of the work is trying to be relevant against the global social zeitgeist. Some of it worked and was on point, some of it required a little more critical thought so that the willing intentions to do purposeful work translates into real-world impact.

■ *Tell us more about yourself and why you believe you were selected – your judging experience and so on.*

I was lucky to win a Gold and Bronze Loerie in the Events & PR category in the early 2000s for the launch of the Golf 5 for Volkswagen, which resulted in me being invited to judge then and again the last four or five years. I actually was not going to judge this year as I am transitioning out of the advertising and marketing industry as a creative and strategic director - and offered my place to a younger judge from my old team, but after a convo with Preetesh (Loeries CEO), I agreed to stay on.

Having invested my last five years of my career in learning about critical diversity and inclusion, I believe that my voice is an important one in the judging panel as my training and experience in applying a critical lens to narratives and content assists in picking up work that helps us to challenge some of our societal issues in a meaningful way – and to also identify work that while it may be slick and smooth, may require more consideration towards authenticity.



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■ *When you heard about being selected as a judge, how did you celebrate the news?*

■ **What does this mean to you, personally?**

I appreciate the recognition of the need to have an inclusive panel made up of diverse backgrounds, voices and opinions that means that we challenge the status quo, resulting in the best, most important work breaking through as winning entries.

“ I am grateful that my voice is considered to be one of those. ”

■ **Which category will you be judging?**

I judged the Events and PR category

■ **What do you expect to experience as a judge?**

I always love meeting the international jury and members of our panel who are not from South Africa - and look forward to learning from them and hearing their critique of our work from an outsider's POV.

■ **What specific criteria will you be looking for when judging?**

I always look for originality of thought – this is critical for me, as well as authenticity and effectiveness. Critical thinking by the teams behind the work, in a world that is struggling with so many shifts, always gets my vote. And of course, brilliance in conception and high attention to detail and craft are elements that always catch my eye.

■ **You have some major experience in the creative industry. Could you comment on the impact of Covid-19 on the industry?**

I think Covid-19 has challenged us deeply as a society, it has ripped open the belly and revealed a lot of the broken parts that have been sticky-taped together. For some agencies it has pulled the carpet right out from under us.

“ While challenging, this provides us with the opportunity to ask some deeper questions about the changing role of advertising - and to get frank about its relevance in the greater social and media landscape. ”

While this may, like any hard conversations, make things a little uncomfortable, being ok with discomfort, and being able to tackle the innate issues in our industry head on, is crucial if we are to rebuild and redirect our talent towards more meaningful ways of telling stories – which is essentially what we do.

Alternatively, we risk losing our talent to other industries that offer more meaningful careers and futures.

■ **Share a few of your favourite Loeries-related moments over the years – either from attending personally or agency winning work-related.**

As a hip-hop head from the 80s and 90s, I always love seeing DJ Ready D on the decks every year – there is something reassuring about seeing our heroes we have grown up with performing consistently with such craft and brilliance. I always get such a rush when he hits the 1s and 2s.

I've attended the Loeries as a kippie back in Sun City, as a winner in Margate and as a judge in both Sun City and Durban – seeing the industry transform over the years across intersections, to be more representative of our people and continent, has definitely been a heartwarming experience.

■ **What do you believe SA creatives bring to the Loeries judging mix?**

We bring our sense of humour, our eye for the untold and our ability to identify moments that define who we are as a people, however messy and imperfect we may be. Great creatives pick up on stories that humanise the untold against the

societal complexities that make us who we are. Strong creatives see the bigger picture and are able to pick up work that distils these moments that will move us at our very core.

■ **What does #FightTheGoodFight mean to you?**

#FightTheGoodFight cannot be just a slogan. Against our highly unequal society, it requires structural, systemic and meaningful change for it to truly come to life. I am hopeful that we will see an acceleration of this towards creating a more inclusive and impactful ecosystem in our industry.

What does that look like in South Africa? Definitely breaking out of a middle-class notion of creativity and storytelling by decolonising the industry. We need to focus on deliberately building agencies and brandwork that assists in playing a part in the critical societal challenges we face here in SA for example, fighting outdated ways of thinking and being through honest work, driving job creation for talent that may otherwise be missed, assisting with student fees for those who cannot afford it - and reimagining a future world of creativity that is truly far away from the old Madmen world where advertising had its privileged birth.

We all have an opportunity to come along on this journey, no one needs to get left behind, but the necessary dialogues must be had, those of us in the status quo need to be open to unlearning, relearning and sharing - and thereby, I believe lots of meaningful change will happen.

For more:

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