

Purpose-driven storytelling drives communication

The 2019 SABRE Africa Awards were a testament to the increasingly engaging public relations campaigns coming out of the continent. WE Communication's *Sarah Gooding* was invited to share some of the agency's award-winning work at the Holmes Report In2Summit event in Kigali on the afternoon before the Awards event.



Kigali, Rwanda. Image source: Gallo/Getty.

Here's what she had to say about emerging trends within the African PR scene:

▄ What was the overall calibre of work like?

It was exciting to see the level of work competing at this year's SABRE Awards. Agencies are becoming increasingly creative in their drive to tell powerful, relevant stories, and we can certainly be proud of the work we're creating as a continent.

▄ Was there a recurring theme across award-winning work?

Consultancies that perform well are typically those leading or at the very least ensuring they prioritise the conversation around data and analytics. As an industry we're still at the beginning of our data revolution, but already we see that those campaigns that generate the greatest long-term success and impact are those that leverage strong insights. PR will always be built on creativity, but the difference now is that successful campaigns are using data to inform their strategies.

▄ WE was the second most awarded agency of the evening* – what in your opinion made the agency's awards campaign so successful?

Like many players in the industry WE has turned its attention to more strategic insights to drive measurable results. One campaign we are particularly proud of is *She will Connect*, which we worked on together with Intel. The objective of *She will Connect* was to empower women across Africa with access and a basic understanding of technology. Taking into account that women in developing countries are 25% less likely to be online than men, we had our work cut out for us. To put together a plan of execution, the campaign relied on several layers of insights, beginning with how women in Africa access the internet, which platforms they use and how they use them.

Another conversation currently taking place across the industry is the need for communicators to be immersed in the communities within which they are targeting their communication. And this campaign drew heavily on community involvement. To motivate and inspire more women to join the programme, we wanted to create authentic and identifiable stories of women who had experienced the programme. But, challenges such as language barriers made this tricky. So, in order to construct compelling stories, we identified people within the communities Intel wanted to reach, who could help us extract and ultimately build those powerful narratives.

■ **What did you find most interesting about the discussions taking place this year?**

As would be expected, conversations are very much driven by ethical, purpose-driven storytelling. This is not new. But what is new, is our understanding of what purpose-driven storytelling should look like. True purpose is about much more than driving awareness around societal challenges or telling feel-good stories about the ways in which brands are giving back to society. Doing good should also be good for business, and business campaigns with true purpose will reflect this impact.

■ **What does great, purpose-driven storytelling look like?**

One thing highlighted during the conference was that success is about converting detractors to promoters. By this I mean that it's simply not enough to create awareness around your cause, rather you have to get more people to buy into the cause, so that they become ambassadors for that cause themselves.

For example, we do a lot of work for one of our clients around the many ways in which AI will benefit society. But, as is typically the case with new technology, people are afraid that AI might have a negative future impact, particularly where automation and job losses are concerned. And so, by showing them an alternative future – one in which AI has transformed the way we live and work for the better – we can start converting the naysayers. The more open businesses are to adopting AI, the more successful they are, and ultimately, entire societies benefit.

**WE Communications was winner of seven African Sabre Awards in 2019 across categories that included Technology, Financial and Professional Services, Travel and Leisure, B2B Marketing, Research and Planning, and Public Education.*

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