

Authentic world-class advertising from Africa

 By [Paul Jackson](#)

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The advertising business in Africa is historically linked to the entry of multinational communications networks into the continent at first during the colonisation era, but even more aggressively post colonisation. The dominance of global agencies in the early days of the business was therefore not surprising and, with time, expatriate staff that managed accounts were replaced by locals as the craft became more established on the continent, so the global agencies adapted their services to be more relevant to the continent.



Paul Jackson, CEO at Grey Advertising Africa

In the 1970s, there was a popular wave of nationalisation across the continent as most military regimes adopted legislation that led to resource control. The advertising business went through a big shift with the indigenisation of top positions in the local shops of global networks and top executives in those companies looking for greener pastures by taking advantage of the nationalisation policies and establishing their own firms.

The local agencies had a much stronger footing as the 1970s came to an end and the austere period of the 1980s came upon the continent.

African economies struggled in the 1980s as the consequences of the loans they borrowed led to economic restructuring and the need for commercialisation of industries and services that were centrally controlled by the government led to a proliferation of media companies and a significant increase in available media inventory on the continent. This also led to increased brand competitiveness and a need for performance metrics which weren't readily available on the continent, and we gradually got back to needing access to global tools.

So, from the 1990s, the global networks became dominant on the continent again with mergers, affiliations, associations, and outright purchases of erstwhile local agencies.

Glocal vs Local

Thirty years on, the old battle is back and there is Glocal vs Local reloaded somewhat, but this time, with the world much more integrated and tools much more sophisticated, it doesn't seem a fair fight, not that it's ever been.

On the one side is all the arsenal you can think of in terms of tools of the trade that produce world-class advertising. On the other side, however, are nimble outfits that use local insights to uncover new opportunities and last-mile relevance. Africa's growth is predicated on the best of both worlds, yet its constantly seen as a battle that needs to be fought to the last man.

With this history in mind, when Grey Advertising Africa set out to develop and grow its African network, we went for the best of both worlds. By developing business relationships with best-in-class agencies across the continent from its Johannesburg regional headquarters, we have teams in 35 markets across the continent that have access to global tools to develop their local opportunities. With a mix of training and sharing of best practices, we have seen standards improve and we count among our agency partners some of the most awarded agencies on the continent.



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We are emerging from the pandemic with a renewed commitment to our borderless vision for the continent, having utilised virtual tools to deploy campaigns seamlessly across the continent and we have put our teams to the test while running campaigns executed in multiple languages, with one central idea.

With the post-pandemic world likely going to be one where restrictions are lifted gradually and not an automatic reset button, being able to adapt to the borderless vision will be key to ensuring that we keep producing high-quality work for our clients across the continent.

From Africa to the world...

To wrap up the history lesson, what do we see as the future of Glocal + Local as opposed to battle-hardened Glocal vs Local of the past? We see the application of global tools to local insights as the ideal mix that will produce work that is authentically African and that will dominate the world. We see a type of advertising work that will emerge from the continent and travel the world creating a global phenomenon. And we aren't that far from it.

Glocal + Local in our view is the final piece of the puzzle that stops us from borrowing and copying from the world and begin talking to the world from Africa with an authentically African point of view.

To buttress the point about not being too far from it, let's consider African music and how far away it seemed from the

mainstream global stage. Five of the 12 songs on the *Coming 2 America* soundtrack had African artistes and the movie itself had a South African playing a leading role with Trevor Noah being Trevor as a sideshow. African talents weren't that recognised when the first movie was released 30 years ago so it's a giant leap forward. Plus, *Coming 2 America* was nominated for this year's Oscars for its authentic African costumes.

At Grey Advertising Africa, we see an authentically African commercial shot in Burkina Faso someday winning a Cannes Lions creative award. That is the journey we are on and it's one worth championing.

ABOUT PAUL JACKSON

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