

The future of advertising: People power and gender diversity

By [Loyiso Twala](#)

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The year ahead buzzes with talk of trends: Artificial Intelligence (AI), humour, purpose, blockchain, video, gaming, and the inevitable buzzwords. While these hold weight, the industry's true sustainability lies elsewhere: with the power of people.

Ultimately, it's people who drive this fascinating industry forward. Without them, none of these advertising advancements would hold any meaning.



Loyiso Twala, chief creative officer, McCann Joburg. Source: Supplied

As I write this, a few months have passed since the Loeries awards ceremony took place in October 2023. Hundreds of creatives from across the length and breadth of South Africa, to Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates (and everywhere in between), are glued to their mobile phones and laptop screens every year as they wait in eager anticipation for the release of the Loeries rankings.

This is a moment that is arguably one of the pinnacles of recognition for anyone in the marketing and advertising industry.

To see one's name proudly displayed, marking the culmination of a year's dedication and hard work, is a career-defining moment for any individual or agency. It means a lot to know that the whole world will see posts across every social media

platform, symbolising a celebration of hard-earned success with the simple yet powerful message: "Look, our hard work paid off."



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I was privileged to find my name on page 8, ranked 20th across Africa and the Middle East, amidst a distinguished roster of creatives who have steered their agencies to creative acclaim as chief creative officers (CCO) in 2023. The initial wave of euphoria upon seeing my achievement was soon replaced by a more reflective observation.

Just ahead of me, in 19th place, was Fran Luckin, one of the only female CCO's to receive this accolade. This revelation brought with it a sense of disappointment, not in my or Frans accomplishments, but in the realization that our industry is still far too dominated by the likes of me, men.

Championing diversity in CCO roles

To those who might suggest that the rankings reflect a shortfall in performance among women at this level, I firmly disagree. Moreover, I would point out that this discrepancy in representation is not a new development; it was evident in the rankings of 2022 and 2021 as well. The only variance in the pattern occurred in 2021 when Justine Armour accompanied Fran Luckin.

The reality that CCO roles are predominantly held by men in major agencies is a narrative that demands change. This is not just about one year or a single ranking; it is a systemic issue that underscores the need for a transformative approach to leadership diversity in our industry.

Looking toward to 2024 and beyond, my hope is that the future is female. It's imperative, in my opinion, that agencies either pledge anew or strengthen their commitment to nurturing and advancing their female talent across the board.

For the future to be female, it needs to be affordable too. In a world full of ideas around policy, organisation, pressure groups and charters, here is an idea that could help change the narrative: beyond 2024, let's pay for the hard work. Literally. The industry needs a grant funding mechanic that amasses contributions towards a kitty that is allocated for women-led projects that have creative potential to win awards, making those entries affordable for them to submit.

Empowering women in the creative industry

This is just one of many ways to increase their chances of winning as they excel. What does success look like in this context? More metal for more women to rise up the ranks across all platforms. Soon we will see more of these very deserving candidates leading our agencies at CCO level.

That's only one possibility that exist amongst a myriad of others. As we look to being more inclusive and making meaningful change, every single effort counts in getting us to a better future beyond outdated ideologies such as patriarchy. A shared future is a far richer one. As the saying goes, "Kuhlonishwa kabili." Yes. Respect goes both ways.

When I look at how many executive creative directors (ECDs) were ranked at last year's Loeries, I feel more optimistic and hopeful as nearly a quarter of the 30 creatives listed were female. Still, this is not nearly enough. So, our industry has work to do. Let's do it.

Let's witness more women say, "Look, our hard work paid off."

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