

Damon Stapleton on picking Saatchi & Saatchi Australia



By Herman Manson: @marklives

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[Damon Stapleton](#), executive creative director at TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris, has announced that he is [heading to Saatchi & Saatchi Australia](#) to take up the role of ECD at that agency. This follows initial reports that he would be [heading to London](#) (additional job offers landed on his desk as soon as initial reports revealed he was preparing to leave TBWA).



Damon Stapleton

Stapleton ([@D_Stapleton](#)) lead the team behind the [Trillion Dollar campaign](#), done for *The Zimbabwean*, which swept the 2009/10 ad awards season to become one of the most-awarded advertising campaigns in adland history.

The then worthless Zimbabwean currency was used to create a billboard, murals, posters and flyers for *The Zimbabwean* newspaper (a [follow-up campaign](#) for the paper has been met with less acclaim so far - handing TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris Johannesburg only three Silvers a Campaign Gold and a Silver at the [2011 Loerie Awards](#), a Bronze Cannes Lion and the only South African Titanium finalist at Cannes).

Stapleton has worked on brands as diverse as Adidas, Heineken, Nissan, Exclusive Books, Yfm, Jameson, BMW and the Apartheid Museum. Here follows an edited version of our Q&A with him.

■ ***You are busy packing for Oz. Why now? What made you decide it was time to move to another agency in another country?***

Damon Stapleton: With the success of the last couple of years, obviously people have been talking to me. It was not a simple process to choose Sydney (ask my wife). The combination of who[m] I'd be working with and what I would be working on and where I'd be working made me feel like it was time for a new adventure.

■ ***You had three offers on the table, including one from London. Tell me about the scramble...***

Stapleton: I had three offers - [from] London, Singapore and Sydney. To be honest, the London offer led to the Sydney

offer. They all had merit; they were all good offers. All it came down to was who my partner would be.

■ ***And you picked Saatchi & Saatchi Australia because?***

Stapleton: Firstly, it's what is right for my family. [Also], the creative pedigree of Saatchi & Saatchi Australia is like that of Hunt Lascaris; they were both agency of the decade. Also the lengths they went to, to get me to go there. I really felt that Mike Rebelo (my partner) shared the same vision. He understands creativity. He was one of the people [responsible for the T-Mobile work](#) that came out of London in the last 2 years.

■ ***I didn't know you were born in Oz. How did you land here?***

Stapleton: My father was a 60s' rock-star (I am not joking) who fell into the hotel business. He persuaded Sol Kerzner to give him the job of running Chobe Game Lodge in 1973. That's how I ended up in Africa.

■ ***So when do you start?***

Stapleton: I start on the 10 January 2012

■ ***Are there any other South African agencies you would still have liked to work at?***

Stapleton: A few. But more than agencies, there are specific people I wish I had worked with, because combinations of people rather than agencies create great work.

■ ***You've pretty much won everything there is to win (including a Cannes Grand Prix, a Grand Clio, an ADC Black Cube and a D&AD Black Pencil). Your perspective on awards and the importance our industry attaches to it?***

Stapleton: Despite what many may think, being a creative is a tough job. You need thick skin to deal with a lot of rejection. I always believe creatives should be rewarded for coming up with great ideas. The truth is creativity is often subjective and intangible.

So awards, although imperfect, create some sort of measurement. This is important for any creative's career. It can be a brutal business and to succeed you have to get noticed. And this will always be a combination of what you have won and what you have done. Look at the early career of a great creative like [David Droga](#) and you will see that.

Having said that, I believe in the future awards will change significantly. We are consuming media in [a] far more integrated way. Awards, however, have many categories. This will have to change. Advertising will change more in the next five years than it has in the last 100 years.

■ ***[Trillion Dollar](#) was a major award winner. Is this the campaign you are proudest of?***

Stapleton: Sure, I am proud of the most awarded campaign in the world. I am proud of the awards. But what I am most proud of [is] the five people who backed an idea. When we backed the idea, we were not sure it would do anything. I am proud of the belief. And, yes, the rewards were very nice.

■ ***Michael Rebelo (@MikeRebel), the CEO at Saatchi & Saatchi Australia, [talks about](#) creating a 'company-wide culture around creativity.' I'll be honest - I thought that was supposed to be the default mode at ad agencies - but obviously some have been getting it wrong. In terms of company culture, what do you seek and how will you contribute to building it?***

Stapleton: Unfortunately, creativity is not the default mode for many advertising agencies. Creativity is our USP but I think as an industry we forget this sometimes. Packaging and selling are important but they mean nothing without an idea.

In the end, you can't make someone creative; you can only give them an environment to be creative in. This is where I agree with Steve Jobs who, when asked how he motivate[d] people, he said, "I don't. I hire motivated people. The right people will create the right culture." A lot of agencies forget this.

■ ***In [Campaign Brief](#) you mentioned the importance of a partnership between agency management and the creative side of the business. Is this something your time at TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris really brought home to you?***

Stapleton: I have never subscribed to the David Koresh School of Advertising - the cult of the individual. Weiden and

Kennedy; Crispin, Porter and Bogusky; Hunt and Lascaris; King and James; Saatchi and Saatchi - I could go on. All great agencies are created through the power of partnership. I have always believed that partners, however, are just not that easy to find.

■ **Does TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris have a replacement for you yet?**

Stapleton: Ask the grown-ups. [According to Ivan Moroke, group MD at TBWA South Africa, the agency is in the final stages of negotiation with a replacement for Stapleton.]

■ **Best of luck Damon!**

Corrected at 2.24pm on 30 November 2011. Bizcommunity.com regrets the error.

Additional followup campaign wins added at 2/33pm on 30 November 2011.

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The inaugural Vodacom Social Media Journalist of the Year in 2011, Herman Manson (@marklives) is a business journalist and media commentator who edits industry news site www.marklives.com. His writing has appeared in newspapers and magazines locally and abroad, including Bizcommunity.com. He also co-founded *Brand* magazine.

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