

Jana + Koos

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

3 Mar 2016

Responsible for ad campaigns, brand management, exhibitions and activations such as Simon & Mary, Nike, Workshop Newtown and JHB Hates You, Jana Hamman and Koos Groenewald from concept studio Jana + Koos are true brand management mavericks. Working in a wide variety of fields through many different mediums, Jana + Koos focus on the inception of new brands. We chatted to Jana for Bizcommunity's #BrandManagerMonth.

■ Jana + Koos are in charge of some super-hip and edgy brands; are you fairly selective when it comes to clients or do you generally get those sort of clients approaching you for work?

These days we're lucky enough to get these kinds of brands approaching us, because they're looking for something that resonates with the kind of approach/ thinking we've become known for. We weren't picky when we started at all - we didn't have that luxury - but for us it was (is) never about only working on 'hip and edgy' brands as much as working with clients and brands that are open to our way. We can get excited about pretty much anything and pride ourselves on the diversity of work we've produced.



■ What's the background of the company? How and when did you start?

We met at university, we studied Information Design at Tuks, became good friends and realised quite early on that we worked really well together (largely because we are such different individuals). Our first job was at Grey Worldwide, as art directors in their relatively new 'activation department'. So we sort of fell into advertising by mistake, but the integrated thinking that was a big focus in our degree was a perfect fit for a department that was focussed on new ways of engaging and communicating with an audience. We were fortunate enough, as graduates, to work (and drink) alongside a whole heap of industry greats, including Kerry Friend, Juliet Honey, Jenny Glover, Brent Singer, Bruce Anderson, Rob Rutherford, Karabo Denalane (to name just a few). From there, we went on to work at React, another non-traditional 'ideas agency', which later (and in a move that was very much ahead of its time) merged with PR company Red Cube, to form Hello World – a new kind of agency that, with the support of strong PR, was dedicated to a media-agnostic, holistic and exciting approach to solving communication problems. 2011 was our first year working as Jana + Koos (a name we decided to run with considering that by that stage that's what we were referred to anyway as a team, from all these years of

working together).



Simon & Mary Safari Lookbook

■ ***What have been some of the favourite branding projects that you have worked on?***

Well, one thing we have definitely learnt - and is a huge focus to us - is that the enjoyment/fulfillment that comes with a project rests a lot more with the people we work with, than the project or how 'cool' it is. (Most) clients inevitably end up becoming really good friends, and the greater that relationship and the trust that comes with it, the greater and easier and more enjoyable the end result. To name a few: Simon and Mary, Nike (Rosebank store and Braamfontein spot), Darling, Mesh (launching this year), Left post productions, Workshop Newtown, Rolling Thunder, The Hellcats band.



Nike concept store

■ ***You seem to be involved in an immense number of projects and campaigns, often utilising diverse media. How do you manage/find time for it all?***

Well we might have cracked the 'how to do lots of work' part, but we're still working on the 'work/life balance' side of things. In general, we work too hard and take on more than we should because we get excited by the kind of projects that cross our paths. In terms of different kinds of media – we always try to find new and the right channels to use for our work and we like getting people who are experts in the fields that we aren't, to help out when we run out of talent/time.

■ ***Your work often seems to blur the lines between branding, design and art. What are your backgrounds?***

Branding, design and art! But also fashion, bicycles, motorbike trips, travelling, music and partying too much. We've always been too schizophrenic to do only one thing and suppose our work and diversity of projects reflects that.



JHB hates you

❑ **Can you explain the concept behind campaigns and art shows, JHB hates you and City of [Gold Diggers](#)?**

When it comes to our personal projects and art, there is a constant that is specific to the way anything we do comes about, and it's humour. We don't overthink anything (we do that all day, every day for other brands), so for us we really focus on having fun and playing, and a lot of the stuff we do originated as a joke between us. JHB hates you (now a fully fledged trademarked property) started as a conversation we were having because we so often get asked why we love JHB so much. And it really comes down to the personality of the city, and the personalities that you'll find there. It couldn't care less what you think, it makes you really work to discover it's lovable bits, it's sarcastic and rude, and below the belt - and actually ugly in so many ways. But the fact that on the surface it's such a struggle and not parading itself to you, almost under the guise of actually just hating you, is why you love it so much. JHB hates you is the sarcastic, funny, personality that we assign and experience from living here, and it's because it resonates with us, our senses of humour and the idiosyncratic approach that reveals itself in our personal work.



JHB hates you

❑ **What are you currently working on?**

We're currently working on a couple of bigger projects, which have been quite exciting: The Rosebank Art Mile (a precinct launching in JHB this year), a new kind of business/ member's club called Mesh, a new bespoke hotel coming to Cape Town, a music video for Hellcats, our own concept/studio space in Cape Town (and then personally a whole bunch of side projects that we do together and in our personal capacities, including fashion, illustration, adventure, jewellery and art), etc, etc, etc!

▣ ***What do you see currently as the main challenges and/or opportunities for your brand sector?***

Well, in our case, it's difficult even to know exactly what sector we sit in. It's both a blessing and a curse. Things that are definite challenges regardless that we either experience or come across through the grapevine: budgets, and the value of the incalculable; the idea, the brand. How to remain small, nimble, flexible and organic, when the delivery goes from bespoke to mass media. Creatives generally don't know anything about running a business - we have no idea what we're doing from a business point of view, whether or not we're actually making money or not - and there are a lot of smaller start-ups, because the industry is calling for that offering, but there is very little support or mentoring that isn't a cookie-cutter approach to ventures that are not copy and paste in nature.



Drol Colab

▣ ***What is the brand marketing budget usually split across - ATL, BTL, digital, content marketing etc?***

We don't focus on this at all – for two reasons. We create new brands, so our work is focussed on the inception of brands, rather than purely communication. And, secondly, (as arrogant or hugely naïve as this may come across) in our experience, if you have a great product/ service, and build a unique, authentic, meaningful, strong brand around it – you shouldn't need to have such extensive marketing and communication strategies. Simon and Mary is the best example of this. Locally and internationally, this is a really loved and desired brand, and the only real communication we do is when we launch new ranges to showcase new products. We really aren't technical when it comes to communication strategies, we're logical about it. It's human nature at the end of the day, the way you communicate to other people and want people to communicate with you (non-evasive, not screaming, not tricking, not forcing things down throats). Create something interesting instead, give people something to discover and choose to share themselves. Everyone is just screaming at everyone else (and no one listens or cares for that).

■ ***Does your brand still see the value of TV, print and other mainstream media?***

Sure, as long as the message comes before the medium. Clients go to agencies asking for TV ads, and we don't believe in that at all. (Unless they have millions of rand and just want to make a piece of entertainment for their own personal enjoyment?). As an industry we are way too caught up in the medium, and the box ticking of the latest marketing terminology (often fancy ways of saying really basic things). And so everyone has the same solution to every problem to reach every market and are playing catch up with each other in the scramble of mediums with identical, generic messages.

■ ***What are the biggest obstacles to take up and planning of 'new media' campaigns?***

We don't plan new media campaigns at all. We try to create brands and make work that is interesting, real, dynamic and for that reason get taken up on new media and shared because they're being enjoyed or appreciated. I mean what does 'new media' even mean. We aren't very interested in marketing jargon, or trying to sell marketing jargon to clients, it becomes a lot of box ticking in favour of plain-and-simple logic and common sense.

■ ***What do you love most about your brand?***

Well. I only know we have a brand because people keep bringing our brand up as such, but really it's probably the truest testament to the fact that brands are and happen organically, and authentically, and there is room for mistakes. Our Instagram account, for instance, probably the platform that made us a brand, was never set up strategically or for professional reasons, it's completely un-curated and to a large extent just embarrassing, but I guess it offers some insight and common ground to us as human beings that people identify with. It's also a testament to the fact that it really is about what you do as a brand, much more than it is about what you communicate about yourself.



Darling Identity

■ ***Which creative/digital agencies are you currently working with?***

We love working with other people, individuals or companies – currently: Injozi, Lampost, Travys Owen, Gabrielle Kannemeyer, Shaun Bond, Zander Opperman ...

■ ***What do you love most about the South African consumer?***

They are savvy, proud, and support local. And (for the most part), they have a sense of humour and can take a joke.

■ ***What are your own personal favourite brands?***

This is the hardest question of this bunch. We both feel like we were hitting a blank, but maybe because there's just so much that we like and have liked. I don't think we have favourites, though, as it keeps changing with every new product, range, ad, album that comes out. We are obsessed with what's been happening locally in fashion and design over the last couple of years, the big impression that these incredible talents are starting to make on the world. Dokter and Misses, Pichulik, Adriaan Kuiters & Jody Paulsen, Rich Mnisi, Sol-Sol, Porky Hefer, Waif (the list is endless).

Other than that, currently Koos is obsessed with Justin Bieber's latest album, and I always have and always will be obsessed with the Japanese fashion greats like Commes des Garçons, Issey Miyake, Kenzo, Junya Watanabe, Yohji Yamamoto.

■ ***What brand marketing campaign have you noticed and been impressed by recently/ever?***

It's such a mixed bag of nuts between the two of us and ranges from fashion to bicycles to bands. We both love Maxhosa and feel proud just being South African because of that brand and everything that he does. We love a dance file called Pina, and the 90s-ness of the new Stussy and CK campaigns. Petit Noir as an artist, brand and campaign. The Kooples for the simple idea of using real couples as their marketing. Envy bicycle wheels because we couldn't make out what the logo said for the longest time. Issey Miyake, and Adidas, but mostly the stuff done with Jeremy Scott or for Y-3. FKA twigs as a creative director of herself and everything that you see of her. Young and Lazy, because they often do things that make us go, "shit we should have thought of that first". Blue Forest Collective's balls to create the proof of concept for their movie Kariba (that made front page of reddit), something on their own, in their own precious free time, because they feel the local animation industry that they feel has so much more to offer. Kanye! For keeping us entertained and Instagram, because it

is an endless effortless access window to everything that's cool/ weird in the world and because it doesn't tell you what you should be doing, (enjoy it while it lasts ...)



Maxhosa

■ ***What inspires you, personally?***

Literally everything. People, places, conversations, challenges, each other, relationships, TV, the internet, jokes, food, art, books, love, hate, magazines, dreams, culture. We try to surround ourselves with what we don't like, as much as with what we do.

■ ***Do you consider yourself a brand?***

Our service/offering/company is a brand. But no, we don't consider ourselves as brands, and find idea of 'personal brands' a bit of a joke.

■ ***If your personality could be summed up in a song, what would it be?***

Hold me closer tiny dancer.

■ ***What's your favourite emoticon?***

Sarcastic face and aubergine. Usually in combination. A gold heart and knife also still makes frequent appearances – an inheritance from the JHB Hates You project that lives on.

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ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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