

It's not about advertising... It's about people

 By [Jason Xenopoulos](#), issued by [The Loeries](#)

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For anyone working in the advertising industry, escaping Cape Town during winter to attend an industry event where the temperature is thirty degrees and the ocean is visible from your room probably means that you are on your way to Cannes. This year it could also mean that you've come to the Loeries.

Durban 2015: I admit to having been a sceptic but now that I am here, with a suitcase full of shorts and t-shirts, I am starting to see the benefits. The weather isn't the only similarity between Loeries Durban and Cannes Lions - another is the quality of this year's speakers at the Creative Seminar.

The day kicked off with an eye-opening showcase of creative technology from Steve Vranakis, the ECD of Google's Creative Lab. Demonstrating how technology can provide a canvas for creativity, Google's DevArt exhibition combines art and code in new and exciting ways. From a globally-connected keyboard that allows you to "play the world", to a 3D printer that empowers visitors to design, create, and exhibit their own art, DevArt is a ground-breaking example of the intersection between technology and creativity.

But despite the techno-centric content of this talk, it was Vranakis's approach to people - rather than technology - that established the key theme for the day. "When you have an empathetic perspective about people," he said, "it brings great power to everything you do."

This people-centric approach to creativity was echoed by many of the speakers at this year's DStv Seminar of Creativity. According to Stan Sthanunathan, Senior Vice President of Unilever, "You need to start by understanding people as people not as consumers." Building on Unilever's passion for purpose-driven marketing, Sthanunathan says that brands need to move from "*Marketing to People*" to "*Mattering to People*".

Chris Clarke, the Chief Creative Officer of DigitasLBi, echoed these sentiments when he said that "creativity can no longer be morally neutral", a trend that Clarke felt was well reflected in the work that he judged at Loeries this week. Juxtaposing the growing ubiquity of technology against our needs as people Clarke said, "the human condition is not a bug to be fixed".

Chuck Porter, the co-founder of Crispin Porter + Bogusky, treated us to a laundry list of valuable insights including nuggets like "pop culture is currency", "everything is interactive", and "focus groups are the death of advertising". But the best thing

about CP+B is that they realise that our industry is ultimately about more than just advertising. "We spend a lot of time with our clients trying to solve their business problems," he said. Crispin Porter's work for Domino's Pizza, which includes crazy ideas like giving customers the ability to order a pizza using an emoji, is proof of this fact. Domino's share price skyrocketed during the time that CP+B has worked on the brand.

While the insights and technology provided by these speakers was invaluable, it was Ali Ali's hilarious and self-effacing perspective of the ad industry that was my personal highlight of the day. "The more time you spend in advertising," he said, "the more of a liar and a bullshitter you become." While this acidic comment was only partly meant in jest, Ali's critique of advertising was a refreshing lens through which to view our industry. Using a series of brilliant examples to demonstrate his point he proved that the best advertising is often stupid... because "stupidity is honest".

Ali's attack on advertising wasn't really an attack on advertising at all, but an attack on the things that dilute what makes us great. "Good is the enemy of great," he said. "Good pleases clients, good wins you pitches, good gets you hired, good will get you laid... but great is what matters."

Ali's anti-advertising ideologies were echoed by Ji Lee, Creative Director of Facebook's Creative Shop in New York. "As an advertising creative I realised I was part of the machine that creates junk on the street," he said. In reaction to his growing dissatisfaction with advertising, Lee launched the "Bubble Project" - a guerilla art project that involved sticking speech bubbles on ads around the city, encouraging people to use these speech bubbles to talk back to the ads that shout at them all day long.

According to Lee, personal projects like "The Bubble Project" have had a positive effect on his career. "If you work on personal projects that you are passionate about great things will happen."

Tim Lindsay, the CEO of the D&AD advertising festival, changed the tone of the conversation by forcing us to focus on the environmental issues currently facing our planet. "We are in a state of Global Ecological Overshoot," he said. Lindsay believes that the advertising industry has both the ability, and the responsibility, to change this. "Our industry is about repurposing problems into solutions," he said. Showcasing a number of D&AD White Pencil winners, Lindsay showed the audience how agencies can help to make a tangible impact on the world. But to transform our industry we need to create new measurement, payment, and incentive systems, he said. "It's time to put your money where your mouth is and join a coalition of the willing."

After a day of insights, groundbreaking technology and inspiring creativity, we were reminded that it's an "understanding of people" that forms the basis of all great and meaningful work in advertising.

And if meaningful great work has been the order of the day, there's only more to come in the next two days where we award the finest, greatest work Africa and the Middle East has to offer.

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