

The Birdcage: looking back at ad awards

 By [Maria Berrios-Carter](#)

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Awards are necessary. They weed out the ordinary and squeeze the 85% Lindt chocolate out of creative candy land.

Creaming the top is always a contentious issue and every year we hear people moan about the unfairness of it, ad nauseam. Mostly from the losers. The winners never judge the judging. Which got me thinking. About the contents of my fridge, my looming deadline, where I left my keys and where Loerie judges judge. I found the answer, near my lost keys. Who knew?

The answer is... context. Judges should judge in the world where ads live.

Radio ad judging

You can't seriously judge a radio ad meant to break through the clutter and stress of rush hour traffic in a nice air-conditioned room with no interruptions and a double latte.

Radio judges should be piled into a car and driven around in peak-hour traffic while listening to the finalist radio ads. There's even a sponsorship opportunity there for car manufacturers. Throw in a roadblock, getting pulled over for talking on your cellphone and let's see who wins.

Print ad judging

Print judges? Recreate a dentist's waiting room, complete with drill noise and the sounds of Gregorian monks losing their religion on panpipes.

The entries? A pile of magazines on the stained coffee table needing to be wrestled from a sticky fingered three-year old throwing a monumental tantrum sponsored by too much Snap, Crackle and Pop. A sweet old granny strategically placed to show print judges a few thousand snaps of her grandchildren in New Zealand who never come to visit, you know.

TV ad judging

Then there's TV. Where does the average S'frican watch TV? In the lounge, with kids playing on the floor, teenager killing channels with the remote and a dog with a flatulence problem.

TV judges would have to negotiate with the teenager to stick to one channel, bribe the smaller kids into going to sleep and

carry the senile dog outside, all while trying to catch the lovingly crafted TV finalists on TV.

Cinema ad judging

A dark cinema with annoying regulars would await the cinema judges. Row A, seats 1-6, taken by kids ready to kick, kick, kick. Three tweeting teenagers in the back row. A couple tongue-hugging and an ordinary-looking man trained in the silent but deadly art of popcorn shuffling torture.

Need more? The one woman who, at the most crucial parts, pipes... "What's going on?"

Digital ad judging

Digital judges are easier. Just plug in and go. Perhaps throw in a few headphone dilemmas, such as giving them delicious crusty BLT sandwiches to eat while judging with earphones in - impossible, right? They keep popping out with the chewing motion.

Apart from this first-world issue, one could mix in a log-in failure, a password query and Facebook distractions but that's as much drama the digital world gets [*we can always throw in an Internet outage or two - managing ed*]. Which is probably why it's becoming most people's second home.

To simply get through

Judging in real life. After all, isn't that the big fight we need to win? To simply get through?

It's not like people sit there thinking "Damn you, CSI programme, getting in the way of my favourite ad!" now, is it? It's the same reason that people don't have photos of their office at home.

Would the results be any different? Hell, yes. Life is messy, full of interruptions and white noise. If your ad can break through that, you got a winner. If not, it's not your fault - blame real life.

ABOUT MARIA BERRIOS-CARTER

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