

Meet young judge Ayanda Siswana

 By Jessica Tennant

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In the run-up to the 22nd Prism Awards taking place on Sunday, 14 April, we chatted to this year's cohort of young judges about their fresh approach to the judging process.

In this series of interviews, we find out what they've learnt working alongside the cluster judges and what their young minds bring to the table.

"This year's young judges' entries far exceeded expectation. The selected group is proof that there's an array of diverse and young talent in this industry and that they have a lot to offer," says co-convenor and founder of the Prisms Young Judges initiative, Palesa Madumo, executive director of strategy at Vuma Reputation Management.

Here, our interview with Ayanda Siswana, account manager at Flow Communications...

▣ **What does this recognition and opportunity mean to you?**

This is big, really big! I have a huge passion for public relations and communications. I am also passionate about growth, development and mentorship when it comes to my journey in PR – and what better way to shape my career.

Finding out that I had been selected as one of the 10 young judges made me ecstatic. This opportunity will do a lot for my career growth, it will empower me and inspire my peers. There's definitely a place for young professionals; our voices count and are taken seriously.

▣ **Briefly tell us about your experience in the industry.**

I have been in the industry for six years, I started off as an intern; like many PR professionals, I needed to complete an internship in order to graduate. During my year of interning, I was promoted to an account assistant, no jokes, because I pushed myself to learn more and do more.

I have had the pleasure of working for some of the country's best PR and communications agencies. My experiences include working on leading global and national brands such as Nestlé, Dove, Hollard, Mars, the Road Accident Fund (RAF), the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the South African National Blood Service, just to name a few.

I have a National Diploma in Public Relations and Communications from the University of Johannesburg, and a certificate in event management after completing a short course through the University of Cape Town and GetSmarter.

▣ **Comment on the judging process.**

The judging process for me was fun, insightful and tough at the same time. Our industry is filled with a lot of creative minds. Funny, how my chief judge told me how my scoring was much higher than the other judges. Oops! I know that in future I will look at the entries from a different lens.

▣ **What has the response been to this year's entries?**

Overall the entries were great; entrants put a lot of work into compiling their entries, however, some of the entries didn't really stand out or they completely missed what was asked in the different criteria, which is why they ended up with low



Ayanda Siswana

scores.

▣ **What makes the winning work stand out?**

A great concept with clear objectives and measurements. Some of the work is pretty obvious and safe. Winning work is something that stands out, it is something with a wow-factor and very disruptive - that combination is a definite win for me.

▣ **Prisa also introduced the Student Campaign of the Year in 2016. Why do you think it's important that PR students are included in such initiatives?**

It's important for PR students to not only show their peers and lecturers how well they need to perform at varsity but also to showcase their work in order to be exposed to the wonderful and real world of PR. Students should stretch themselves and start thinking strategically and creatively. It helps with their career growth and overall development. People are watching and what better way to expose yourself to the industry.

▣ **What do you think young minds bring to the table?**

Insights on what young audiences need, fresh ideas, creativity and different perspectives in relation to current trends.

▣ **What have you learnt working alongside the cluster judges?**

Apart from being terrified and inspired at the same time? Right... I learned that you need to interrogate what you're judging, you need to be fair when judging, you need to really take your time and not rush the judging process. It is important to remember what you're judging; some entrants make a mistake in entering into a sector but completely miss the mark, so when you judge you need to consider that. You don't always have to be nice; you need to be very firm and strict. But most importantly I have learned that as a young judge my voice and insights matter.

▣ **Comment on the past, present and future state of PR.**

PR is often seen as one of the most stressful careers, however, in my view, it is the most rewarding. One gets to shift perceptions, challenge the status quo and change culture one campaign at a time.

With the constantly changing media landscape, PR professionals are not only expected to change with the times but also have the ability to forecast the future and develop the trends that will come. In addition, it's not only journalists that wear many hats these days, but PR professionals as well.

Gone are the days where we see print media as a big news source, social media being the new-age newsroom, which speaks to my point earlier that we need to move with the times.

▣ **What would the title of Prisms Young Judge for the 2019 awards mean to you?**

It will mean Ayanda Siswana, you have made it! You have not only made yourself proud but your family, friends, colleagues and everyone who has contributed to your career. This is truly a career milestone for me.

▣ **What are you most looking forward to in terms of this year's Awards?**

I am looking forward to meeting all the PR professionals that have done amazing work. I am looking forward to seeing the winners knowing that I have contributed to choosing some of them alongside my cluster judges and I am obviously looking forward to having a good time with my colleagues and fellow #PrismYoungJudges family on the night.

As mentioned, the Awards take place this Sunday, 14 April. Follow us on [Twitter](#) for live updates on the night and visit our [Prism Awards special section](#) for other related content and of course all the winners following the announcement. Here's the link to our other [social media](#) pages, as well as the Prism Awards' [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

Jess is Senior Editor: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com. She is also a contributing writer. marketingnews@bizcommunity.com

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