

iKineo's Assegai-winning customer engagement strategy

 By Leigh Andrews

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'Customer engagement' is a buzzword and lofty business aspiration that's often thrown around without any substance. But it's more than that for iKineo - it actually led to five wins for the customer engagement agency at this year's Assegai Awards. Here's how.



iKineo's clutch of 2015 Assegai Award wins

Debi Loftie-Eaton, Managing Director of iKineo, was again on the DMASA Assegai Awards for direct marketing jury. She found that 2015's winning campaign strategies had a strong customer engagement component and a marked shift away from the conventional direct marketing of old to effective customer touchpoint choice. It boils down to "true customer centricity and not just channel solutions," she explains.

Putting the 'I know' into 'iKineo'

Easily done for a 'customer engagement' agency like iKineo, which Loftie-Eaton says, "Builds profitable relationships between brands and people. iKineo works across the disciplines of CRM, data, digital, direct, loyalty, mobile, promotions, social, performance, service design and strategy. We create strategically driven campaigns through relevant channels that drive efficient engagements, creating an impact on customer life-cycles in term of sales, retention, win backs, and usage, using ongoing campaign plan contacts to track and optimise results."

Quite a mouthful - but then so were their results at the Assegais.

Loftie-Eaton is understandably proud of Assegai's iKineo's achievements, scooping a Gold and Bronze award for the Telkom Business Unified Communications as well as a Gold and two Bronzes for Explore Sideways.

The Sideways app and booking platform for Explore is a first-of-its-kind in South African tourism and has been very favourably received by tourists and the industry as a whole. By targeting high-profile bloggers and PR personalities, they've been able to reach a surprisingly broad audience with limited upfront capital. Social media went from nothing to a reach of 37,548 Twitter followers, 4,799 Instagram followers and 1,267,341 Facebook followers organically. With a focus on quality over quantity usage, in Sideways' short lifespan they've won 900 active members with 26% week-on-week growth and app interactions lasting 3:40 minutes per session on average.

Then, the Telkom Unified Communications (UC) campaign was seen as a brilliant opportunity to create a break-through package to enable the Telkom key account managers to educate, engage and deliver a superior solution to their customers with ongoing touch points along the campaign journey. While the conversion time frames of the UC deals can be anything from two to five years in terms of actual solutions, just one deal in the Enterprise space that was landed within six months, provided an incredible return on investment. In addition, they were able to track take up of/requests for high-level digitalisation workshops. Deep client 'discovery sessions' as well as ongoing sales engagements allowed for participation and optimisation of campaign success.

Loftie-Eaton's own views by no means swayed the agency's wins though, as this year's Assegai judges were excluded from judging categories containing their own entries and were able to select or identify areas where they believed they could add the most value.

Digital shines in direct judging

Loftie-Eaton says the judging process has been well refined and over the last two years moved to a digital judging system. Final scores were weighted according to three key criteria - strategy, creative and results, with final round judges selected based on at least 10 years' specialist industry experience. The overall standard was high and digital execution showed what can be done in terms of added value in tracking campaign effectiveness.

She also found a wider range of agencies entering the awards, particularly as direct marketing is no longer seen as the "poor cousins" in our industry, but rather an integral, C-level driven engagement to deliver tangible results. That and digital are key trends she believes will continue to grow. She confirms that the direct marketing industry is evolving, with this as one of the most difficult areas to actually see what is being done, due to the direct nature of the communications. She also noted a return to/growth of 3D packs and a noticeable decline in postal campaigns, for obvious reasons.

Looking globally, to winners in Cannes and the International Echo Awards, Loftie-Eaton says things look positive, with SA delivering a standard that can easily compete in international awards. But it's entry fees, timings and other logistics that make these unattainable to local agencies. She believes many of our campaigns really stand their ground in the overseas arena. That said, budget allocations locally to direct marketing and even digital is still small in comparison to global spend, making it more difficult to build high impact. It's a sign of the times.

Forward thinking

In terms of building high impact in future, Loftie-Eaton confirms iKineo is moving into its own Johannesburg premises this month and looking forward to "building a great local team that will focus on growth, new client acquisition and bringing constant innovation, results and creativity to life, alongside our really strong strategic offering."

Looking further afield to trends, Loftie-Eaton says mobile has, is and will continue to grow, bringing about more challenges to develop creative and more opportunities to engage with a view to being able to use a very personal, lifestyle-linked channel to deliver relevant messaging.

Moreover, mobile options to engage are embedded across all market segments, so it makes sense that they have to be used more and more.

"Innovations, technology and the growing focus by customers to own their purchasing decisions can only help us to create brilliant and different communication - so here's to 2016 bringing brave clients, strategic creative campaigns that deliver results and build great brands through customer centric engagements," toasts Loftie-Eaton.

Hear hear! For more on iKineo, visit [their website](#) and [Twitter feed](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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