

What's a Loerie really made of?

 By [Chris Gotz](#)

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Sometime in 1998 I found myself sitting on the roof of a bar in Rocky Street in Yeoville, Joburg. Perched on beer crates, my art director and I were surrounded by a large ring of people. They were distinctly unhappy. Not a malevolent, nasty kind of unhappy, but grumpy nonetheless.

We had just finished a presentation. We had showed them concepts to launch their brave and interesting new radio station.

They thought the ideas were horseshit.

A big, handsome black man sipped his Carling Black Label and said in a voice smeared with maple syrup, "This is not it."

An awkward silence fell over the room as the white boys felt the heat. In my hand I clutched a list of about 30 payoff lines for the new station. They were useless, definitely "not it", all recently destroyed in a spectacular, silent, Stuka-dive of disapproval.

"This is not it," he repeated to us as we fiddled with our fraying quart labels. In Rocky Street the traffic tooted merrily below us. Then he looked up at us. Something lit up.

"This is it!" He jumped up and clapped his hands. "This is it. Yona Ke Yona. This is it!"

A 'Fresh' approach

And with that DJ Fresh, as yet the un-famous version, cracked the payoff line for YFM, the new radio station for Joburg's youth. I'd like to think we played a part - my art director and I - but I would be bullshitting myself.

We raced back to the agency after that, dodging the traffic on Louis Botha with a few more quarts in tow and we did the work.

Weeks later we launched with a petrol bomb mailer sent to generally conservative, mostly white, female media planners. A label on the Molotov cocktail proclaimed, "Yona Ke Yona. This is it. The struggle isn't over, it's just changed."

Cue irate, conservative backlash. Lots of them hated it, but they also noticed it. We compiled a beautiful book that told stories of hopes and dreams - the first awakenings of the incredible new power of the black youth of Johannesburg.

It felt underground and risky and wonderful and new. In no time YFM grew to a million listeners. It is still the fastest growing radio station in South African broadcast history. I'd like to think it was us, but I suspect it had a lot to do with DJ Fresh on that hot, boozy roof in Rocky Street.

Years later I thanked Fresh at a noisy industry party. I reminded him of the moment he cracked the line. I told him the campaign had pretty much launched my career. He remembered and roared and threw his arms around me.

It's made of more than what you see

And so it was that my first Loerie wasn't just made of metal. It was made of many other things. It was made of a moment of defeat and then triumph on a roof in Yeoville. It was made of late nights of wonderful, brave, messed-up varsity students sitting on their beds in dingy flats in Hillbrow - interviewing, despairing, and dreaming,

It was made of agonising meetings trying to tell Randall Abrahams that it was a good idea to send mostly conservative white ladies a petrol bomb in the mail. It was made of a million young people listening to a radio station that spoke to them on their terms for the first time in their lives.

Over the years our Loeries have been made of many things. The hopes and dreams of the Young, the Gifted and the Black in the greatest, most beautiful country on earth. The final, incredible journey of South Africa's favourite car, as thousands of ordinary roadside folk waved goodbye. The true memory retold of a father handing down his Volkswagen Beetle to his son.

There have been elephants hatching out of eggs and talking animals inspired by magic. There have been fashion brands born out of the first fires of the Black Consciousness Movement.

Dreams

Loeries are made of inspiration and madness. They are the brilliant visions of architects and designers and filmmakers and writers and art directors. They are made of sweat and lost weekends and neglected partners and disappointed children. They are made of blood and raucous laughter and terrible meetings and haunting moments in research feedback and tequila swigged straight out of the bottle on a bad Tuesday night.

They are made of hysterical throwaway comments the tea lady made and that time you farted in the lift and your boss got in. In any given year, they could contain the distant memories of a bad joke your dad told long ago, a terrible fear of Parktown Prawns, the beautiful sound of a Highveld thunderstorm, road trips that went wrong and all the strangers who have ever stopped to talk to us in the street.

Loeries are made of the purest, most wonderful things we know. They are made of inspiration and exploration and crazy, ambitious ideas that may not just change the fortunes of a brand, but have the potential to change society itself.

What will this week's Loeries be made of?

I hope at least one of them will contain the dreams of a million ordinary men we turned into champions, the cries of 85 000 demented fans crammed into Soccer City, and the memories of a game of football that changed the way a game of football can be played forever.

I hope so. I wish it more than anything else right now. Until then, we wait.

**This piece would not have been possible had it not been for the sterling creative contributions of DJ Fresh, Clinton Bridgeford and Elli Garb. Viva South African creativity Viva!"*

ABOUT CHRIS GOTZ

Chris Gotz is the Executive Creative Director of Ogilvy & Mather Cape Town. He is also the current chairperson of the Creative Circle and on the Board of the Loerie Awards.

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