

TOPS at Spar produces wine-printed book

South African liquor retailer, TOPS at Spar, has released *Novel Novel*, a 120-page compilation of stories written by the TOPS and Tales online community and printed in a mixture of both wine and ink.



The cover of *Novel Novel*

The idea won two awards at this year's Loeries, a silver in the 'Outdoor and out of home: Direct Mail' category and a bronze in the 'Communication design: Whole Publication' category.

The TOPS and Tales concept was originally developed in 2010 as an innovative social media platform to enable women to organise and manage book clubs – called chapters in the Tops and Tales universe – with their friends while giving TOPS at SPAR an unprecedented strategic and targeted marketing opportunity.

Rachel Brown, art director, says when numerous members of the TOPS and Tales online community expressed a desire to be authors themselves one day, TOPS at Spar and agency, TBWA\Durban, decided to provide them with a platform to make it happen.

The design process

"An open-ended paragraph was written to get the story rolling and members of the online community were invited to write one paragraph each before handing over to the next person. Some 141 aspirant writers and 32 illustrators contributed to the collaborative tale, which evolved into a wonderfully schizophrenic roller coaster ride of a story. In fact, the writing would have continued forever had we not decided to put a full stop on the writing and drinking at 120 pages."

Gina McCulloch, head of production, says using wine to print the book presented its own unique set of challenges. "Most printers we approached thought we were mad and said it couldn't be done. This is because lithography is based on the

mutual repulsion of grease and water. In our case, we were adding wine to the ink, which would automatically separate and make it almost impossible to print. We did have some interest from printers, but we needed to print in volume in order to make this project financially viable.

“We were not willing to give up on the idea. Our Disruption strategy is, after all, about challenging convention and imagining new possibilities. Luckily for us Paul Mindry from the printing company FASTPRINT, was up for the challenge and personally spearheaded the process making sure that it became a reality. Without a second thought an 8 colour Roland printer was cleaned and prepped to run countless tests with various paper stocks to see which substrate would hold the wine.

“After a few weeks of R&D and plenty of wine (not all of it consumed by the machine), they got it to work with a 60% wine and 40% ink mix. The solution to prevent the wine and ink from separating was to continually oscillate the ink duct.

Once printed, the book was bound with an imported cork cover and sealed with a bespoke corkscrew. To date, 620 books have been printed, which will be distributed to TOPS at SPAR's clients and suppliers, with remaining books being allocated to, of course, our TOPS and Tales fans as prizes, because without them there would be no incredible story to be told.

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