

TBWA scoops 4 gold Loeries Awards for Stronger mental health campaign

Issued by [TBWA](#)

11 Oct 2023

TBWA\Hunt Lascaris has won four gold awards for its groundbreaking "Stronger" mental health campaign at the Loeries Awards held last week in Cape Town. The campaign sought to raise awareness of mental health issues by recreating hip-hop singer Ricky Rick's voice to release a song posthumously using artificial intelligence.



TBWA\Hunt Lascaris won four gold Loeries Awards in total for "[Stronger](#)": in the digital category for the use of artificial intelligence (AI), in the digital crafts category for the use of technology, for branded content in radio and audio and for the use of technology in radio and audio. "Stronger", the first AI song to be released in Africa, is a collaboration between TBWA\Hunt Lascaris, Sony Music Africa and the Ricky Rick Foundation. The foundation aims to push activism through art, while creating awareness around mental health.

The campaign also won a silver Loerie (film, music video), a bronze (integrated campaign) and a craft certificate (film, sound design). TBWA/Hunt Lascaris chief creative officer Carl Willoughby said he is deeply grateful to the family of the late musician Ricky Rick, who tragically took his life in February 2022, for allowing them to release this song on his behalf. "The recognition at the Loeries Awards are an indication that the song resonates with a wide audience," he said.

"Our aim as an agency was always to raise awareness about mental health and suicide, especially among South African men." He said the perception that men shouldn't express their emotional or psychological struggles openly was outdated and that he hoped the campaign would encourage those who suffer from depression to seek help, especially given that October is mental health awareness month.

Using AI to resurrect Ricky's voice

One of the most remarkable features of the campaign is how AI was used to bring Ricky Rick's voice back to life. With the permission of the singer's family, the team at TBWA and Audio Militia used clean, pre-recorded voice clips to train machine-learning tools to learn Ricky's voice.

Audio Militia CEO Nick Argyros, the song's technical producer, said they used Riky's last social media posts to write the lyrics of the song. "It was surreal because he had almost left this song in some of the posts and all we had to do was piece it all together," he explained. "We really didn't add anything. All of the words and lyrics used in the song were Riky's."

Willoughby said when Riky's family first listened to the song, they were triggered emotionally. "It was very difficult for them," he recalled. "As you can imagine, a project of this nature has many layers to work through. At one point, the campaign almost never happened."

The family agreed to go ahead and "Stronger" was released to coincide with Youth Day on 16 June 2023. Since then, it has been well received, with fans delighted at the original unreleased track. The campaign reached 59 million people in its first two weeks, as well as reach R9m in earned PR. All profits from the song are being donated to organisations fighting mental illness, including the free mobile mental wellness app [Panda](#).

"Mental health is something that touches our industry," commented Willoughby, "so it made sense for us to do something about it." He added that his wish is that the song's message continues to touch listeners and inspire hope. "If we can save one life through this campaign, it would have been worth it."

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