

Hook, Line & Sinker turns 5

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Meet HLS, an integrated PR and marketing agency that defied the pandemic and emerged as a global player in just five years.



In the midst of a global pandemic that caused economic turmoil and business closures, PR agency Hook, Line & Sinker (HLS) has successfully managed to defy the odds and become a rising star in the media and marketing industry. After formally registering in 2019, the company turned Covid-disruption into a business opportunity and secured local and international clients, established global agency alliances, quadrupled clients and staff, and has managed to scoop a couple of industry awards along the way.

“ Five years have flown by. We can't wait to see what the next will bring. ”

– Adam Hunter

Founded in 2018 by agency Head Honcho, Adam Hunter, HLS was introduced with a vision to breathe life back into the PR game by combining the power of digital with marketing, publicity, advertising, and social media. Young, fresh and innovative, the agency's first client was an international ICT software company which touched on 77% of the world's global transactions. But then the pandemic hit. Many companies and global stock markets struggled for growth, but for some it was about seizing the moment. What was seen as a business threat quickly turned into a promising venture and HLS propelled to new heights and reach across Africa, Europe, America, and the Middle East.

"HLS was only registered three years ago, and the last 36-months have been challenging for both HLS and the PR industry," says Hunter. He has learnt that while the



exciting world of tech and digital was an integral component to the agency's success journey, brands must understand that it creates a divide and a noise that only highly specialised and targeted campaigns can bridge. "For HLS, this is done through delivering a great 'sinker' which is what keeps us innovating and adapting to the challenges that digital presents."

In addition to the agency's unique name, signature yellow branding, and strong employee culture, Hunter explains that the exponential five-year growth is attributed to three factors:

1. **Global brands think local services are lekker:** South Africa is the most favoured location for offshore customer experience delivery worldwide, due to the country having similar time zones as Europe, a high degree of English proficiency, a skilled workforce, digital infrastructure, and attractive exchange rates. This outsourcing trend has now broadened to include content production, marketing and communications support as corporates become increasingly comfortable working across time zones and countries.

Brands have realised that they can secure internationally competitive services at reasonable costs by working across borders. This benefits local brands indirectly, as communications agencies can call on international best practice in their work with South African companies, thus raising the standard of practice across the board.

2. **Tech client uptick:** Historically, times of great crisis have led to times of great innovation and the pandemic was no exception with the dramatic acceleration of new technologies. As HLS specialises in business-to-business (B2B) tech brands and global start-ups, the company experienced a surge in demand from these kinds of clients. Additionally, existing clients ramped up their digital offerings to fill the gaps left by the pandemic, with the agency helping to support and amplify these efforts. As our clients evolved, we have evolved with them to ensure that we remain an asset.
3. **Growth driven by digital comms:** The year 2020 was a defining moment for the company. We hired additional full-time employees, nurtured a growing client list, and multiplied agency revenue during this period through our digital offering and focus on intelligent content development.

In addition, we pride ourselves on being a forward-thinking agency that is results-driven, applies strategic thinking and creativity, and of course has strong relationships with media outlets and journalists.

A (PR) Work of Heart

"Our journey over the last few years has been an incredible one," celebrates HLS Business Unit manager and Chief Whip, Emma Rijkers, who was one of the first full time employees to join the agency. "We are thrilled to have reached this milestone and to have accomplished so much, so quickly. I am proud of the team and the exceptional work delivered. But this is only the beginning, we are growing from strength to strength, and are incredibly excited about the future of HLS."

Thanks to the rapid digitisation over the past two years, the world is changing at an astonishing pace. And just like HLS, the PR industry is adapting and taking advantage of opportunities presented.

In closing, Hunter adds, "The agency's momentum in 2023 isn't slowing down. In Q1, HLS secured six new clients, featuring retainers for OneDayOnly, Hyprop, and IDEA Digital Education, and three media relations projects which include Top Employers Institute and Dineplan.

"Five years have flown by. We can't wait to see what the next will bring. At HLS, the growth continues, our client list is evolving and expanding, and we look forward to supporting more clever brands with creative communications, added with a dash of digital fun."

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