

# Sum of 21 addresses transformation, skills development

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20 Aug 2018

Sum of 21 Academy is a creative agency that offers a 12-month training platform to young, previously disadvantaged creatives and communicators who already have a tertiary qualification and want to enter the creative industry.



Sum of 21 learners/communicators that completed the programme successfully in April 2018.

Due to a significant increase in the uptake of young creatives, a steady client growth and an expanding footprint, the agency has been positioned as a creative force to be reckoned with.

“The fact that Sum of 21 functions as a fully-fledged creative entity and agency sets it apart from other internship and learnership programmes. It generates real-life marketing projects for young creatives and young communicators to work on, thus empowering talented, driven and ambitious youngsters to reimagine their future while bringing fresh ideas and perspectives into the South African advertising landscape,” says Carmen Gunkel, Sum of 21 academic and business head.



Sum of 21 flying high

ETIKET. 30 Jul 2018



Here, Gunkel goes into more detail about how the Academy was formed and the challenges in getting the business off the ground.

## **What sparked the idea to start Sum of 21 and tell us what the agency is all about?**

Sum of 21 Academy addresses two burning issues in the broader creative industry, i.e. transformation and skills development. Operating in an industry that is known and criticised for its notoriously slow transformation, the Academy is a creative incubator that develops young talent so that they can successfully enter the creative industry as juniors in their respective fields. This means that their future employees won't have to spend a massive amount of time getting them ready to productively contribute towards outputs.

In essence, Sum of 21 is an internship or learnership programme that offers young creatives and communicators a 12-month training platform:



Carmen Gunkel, Sum of 21 academic and business head.

*“ We inspire, nurture and enable these creative souls to gain the necessary skills and experience so that they can enter the job market. They gain this experience by working on real-life marketing briefs or client projects under the mentorship, guidance and coaching of dedicated senior staff members. Unlike other internship or learnership programmes, they don't shadow the seniors in an advertising agency and don't work on fictitious or theoretical briefs; the young creatives and communicators do the actual work and gain the actual experience while getting coached and mentored. ”*

In order not to compete for the same money pool as advertising agencies, Sum of 21 is also structured in such a way that it can tap into corporate SA's BEE spend. Clients can tap into their skills development, enterprise development or socio-economic development spend, and in return Sum of 21 delivers marketing, communication and advertising services. In this process, the young creatives and communicators build a really exciting portfolio and gain valuable experience to fast-track their careers.



While we are providing very valuable work-place learning, Sum of 21 also provides the learners with a further qualification, i.e. the National Certificate in Advertising, NQF Level 4 or 5.

### What is your competitive advantage or core differentiator over the rest of the industry?

Sum of 21's biggest advantage is that it is run as a separate company where the interns or learners get to 'run the show' under the guidance of seniors. The fact that we are essentially creating an ROI on BEE spend is also unique in the offering and dovetails well with the Youth Employment Service (YES) that aims to create more than one million paid internships for mainly black South Africans, between the ages of 18 and 35, over the next three years. This truly provides South Africa with new and innovative ways to spend towards BBBEE, while also providing a new solution that will stimulate and contribute towards the growth that we require in our economy.



Incubator initiative uses B-BBEE budgets to train young creatives  
24 Aug 2017



### What is the agency's biggest achievement to date?

It must be our first group of young creatives and communicators that finished the programme successfully in April 2018. 18 candidates completed the programme, and more than 80% are successfully placed in the industry. Currently,

we have 49 young creatives and communicators in the programme, but hope to grow that to a 100 in the near future.

We have also been very fortunate to work on really exciting projects. We are currently busy doing brand and marketing campaigns for 200 SMEs in the FNB SME Development Programme, the Pendergast Advertising Awards trusted us to create all the AV elements for the gala dinner in 2017, and we assisted CTrack with a product launch AV and TVCs.

Another big achievement I believe is the realisation that while we thought we were going to train and mentor the young creatives and communicators (and indeed we do), we also learn so much from them. They enter the programme with such a different and fresh worldview, so many new consumer insights and such unjaded passion, that you simply can't help but to really do your utmost best to prepare them for a creative career.

### ■ **What barriers have you had to overcome in launching this agency?**

I would say our main challenges all revolve around the following patterns:

- The fact that Sum of 21 is neither a traditional agency nor a traditional training provider means that we have to create a new and unique understanding of what this creative incubator is. This also means that we have to challenge our thinking and experience because all permanent staff members come from either an agency or tertiary institution. It also means that we have to build new networks to partner with clients because Sum of 21 is not primarily focused on corporate SA's marketing budgets.
- The type of person we have to appoint as a permanent staff member is a very special and magical creature. Not all creatives are good coaches and mentors, and the Academy's philosophy is that a senior can never take a project over from a young creative or communicator, but has to keep on coaching them till the outcome is of the necessary quality. Put this in the context of real-life briefs with real deadlines, and you can understand why I call them magical creatures.
- The intern or learner also must have a very specific type of personality. While we do require a primary tertiary qualification, most of the young creatives and communicators join without any prior work experience. The perfect intern or learner is quick to unlearn the ways of a student and understand it is a place of work, not scared to explore, not scared to fail quickly, learn the lesson and apply it going forward.

### ■ **Tell us about some of your short- and long-term goals for Sum of 21.**

We are currently in the process of getting accreditation to be our own training provider. At this moment we are still partnering with third-party providers to facilitate, assess and moderate the theoretical components. We should conclude the accreditation before the end of 2018.

We are also exploring and partnering with other subject matter experts to expand Sum of 21's offering from creative services to also include software testing, media strategy and planning, TV production and PR.

We are opening a Sum of 21 Johannesburg campus before the end of 2018, with the aim of opening a Cape Town campus in 2019.

For more information on what the Academy has to offer, click [here](#) and follow them on the following social media platforms: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#).

## ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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