

Lanre Adisa, founder and CCO at Noah's Ark

 By Jessica Tennant

2 Dec 2020

This week, we go behind the mask with Lanre Adisa, founder and CCO at Noah's Ark, Lagos, Nigeria.

At Loeries Creative Week, Adisa spoke on a panel titled: 'Do they know who we are?: A conversation on African creativity'. He said the Loeries is speaking up for creativity in the face of global uncertainty and despair. "It's telling us that creativity matters. Not just in South Africa, but across the continent and beyond."



■ ***So tell us, what's really behind your mask (literally and/or figuratively speaking).***

Behind the mask is a creative who became an accidental entrepreneur, who's been cooped up at home for seven months.

■ ***Where are you locked down?***

I'm here working from home in Lagos. The lockdown has been lifted, but we still work from home for our safety. Reason being that the general public is nonchalant about Covid-19 and we are not too sure if we can trust the authorities.

■ ***How are you finding working from home or physical distancing at the office / how has your way of working changed?***

It's the most unthinkable thing ever. Seven months of moving from my bedroom to my study and very recently relocating to the dining table. It's taken some time to adjust to it. I miss the human touch, but we've somehow found a way to carry on with business and life. Every now and then you feel some sense of loneliness. On the bright side, Zoom and all the video conferencing apps out there have liberalised the flow of knowledge and reduced the distance and traffic trouble of a city like Lagos. It's a mixed bag of sorts.

■ ***Describe a typical workday, if such a thing exists.***

I still rise at the same time as before. I do a 30-minute walk when I'm not feeling too lazy, which tends to be a bit more frequent now. Meetings start from about 9am in the morning and can go back-to-back till evening depending on what's up for the day. It's mainly reviews and client meetings. At other times, it might be light. Whatever happens, I try to take a break in between to relieve stress. The joke here is that I'm the houseman. My wife goes out almost every day. She runs a chain of QSRs. You can't work from home when you run a restaurant!

■ ***How do you maintain a good rapport with your team mates/clients?***

Almost everything is virtual – work, pitches, social engagements. In a time that now looks like aeons ago, we used to have what we call the ‘Arknowledge’ session one hour every Friday. We have managed to move it online and tried our best to retain the spirit of togetherness. On some occasions we turn the session to some sort of group therapy to share our experiences and feelings, especially at the height of the lockdown and very recently, during the social unrest/curfew that came in the wake of the #EndSars protests.

■ ***How do you socialise these days?***

I was never big on socialising. With the lifting of the lockdown, we’ve been doing more family dinners and visits to very close family and friends. It was our silver jubilee in September. My wife and I did a few days in a cosy hotel on Lagos Island. We definitely would have travelled if it were other times.

■ ***What do you do to keep fit/healthy and/or sane (physically/mentally)?***

Brisk walking in the morning (when I can). Table tennis with my sons. Board game with my wife. Reading some of the books I’ve been collecting all this while.

■ ***What new apps would we find if we scrolled through your phone?***

Apps of my favourite radio stations. SoundHound, an app that helps me identify songs by just humming them. A DJ mix app. (I have not figured out how it works.)

■ ***What is the first thing you plan to do when the lockdown lifts?***

Lockdown has been lifted here like I said earlier, but life is far from normal. I’m not in a hurry to go back to the office. That will take some new acculturation.

■ ***Describe your career and if/how the pandemic/lockdown has affected its course.***

From a business point of view, the pandemic demanded some decision-making on prospects, people and profit to keep our business going. It has also been a test of our essence and staying power as a brand. Any business that can still retain its essence and stay relevant and sought after at a time like this should be proud of itself.

■ ***Any companies/brands that you feel have responded particularly well to the crisis and/or Covid-19-related campaigns that stand out to you, and why?***

I like the way Durex took on this new talk of normal vs. new normal. Their ad saying, ‘let’s not go to normal’ is bang on the money, because going back to normal is revalidating some of the baggage of life as we knew it. Just the other day, Burger King tweeted an ad that urged its customers to order from McDonald’s and a couple of other competitors as a way of sustaining their category as France (and other European countries) go into a second lockdown. I thought that was audacious and typical of that brand. Really refreshing when you consider the fact that the pandemic has given birth to a new convention of sameness.

“ We know, we never thought we’d be saying this either. pic.twitter.com/cVRMSLSDq6 — Burger King (@BurgerKingUK) November 2, 2020 ”



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▣ ***What are you working on right now?***

We just launched a piece of music pushing a self-service code from our telco client that has caught on like wildfire. We have just been engaged to work on a government agency that is planning an event/expo in December. We are also getting set to commence brand building work on a new business – an FMCG conglomerate.

▣ ***What does the 'new normal' look like to you?***

Beyond being an annoying cliché, it has offered us a chance to reassess what is important and where to focus our resources and energy now and post-pandemic. Above all, it has proven that we as an industry will always be relevant to the brands in our care and the society at large as regards generating and sustaining hope through our work.

▣ ***What are some of the buzzwords floating around at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself?***

Apart from the usual suspects like "new normal", here in Nigeria the word "palliative" has taken on a new meaning, especially after the unrest. Things got ugly when masses of people across the country started looting warehouses laden with Covid-19 palliative materials like foodstuff and other household essentials. Still on the fallout of the protests is #SoroSoke, a Yoruba phrase that translates to #SpeakUp. It's how the youth of Nigeria define themselves in comparison to their parents whom they tag the It-Is-Well Generation, referencing their religious resignation to oppression. Really interesting times.

▣ ***What advice would you give to other industry folk during this time?***

We've got to focus on the things that are important to our survival as we wade through the storm. We've got to take whatever we can from our current experience, especially from the tech perspective, and see how we can integrate them to life beyond the pandemic. Thinking like a startup will help us get experimental and fearless to effect changes that will be useful to our continued existence going forward. Over and above everything else, we've got to stay consistently relevant.

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*Interviewed by [Jessica Tennant](#).

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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