

# Creating relevant brands for African audiences



By Jessica Tennant

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Media and entertainment company WarnerMedia recently hosted a panel discussion around creating relevant brands for African audiences at Discop Johannesburg 2019.

WarnerMedia creates and distributes premium and popular content to global audiences and operates six channels across the African continent in 56 English, French and Portuguese-speaking countries.

As Julien Borde, head of Channels for France, French-speaking territories, Africa and Israel was on this year's panel, I enquired further into WarnerMedia's involvement in this year's event and how the company plans to implement these insights across the African market specifically.



Cameron Naidoo, creative director at Guerilla Marketing; Guillermo Farre, head of general entertainment Iberia, France and Africa at WarnerMedia; Julien Borde, director of channels for France, French-speaking territories, Africa and Israel at WarnerMedia; and panel moderator David Cornwell from Screen Africa.

## ■ Firstly, tell us a bit more about yourself – what does your role at the company entail?

I joined WarnerMedia in January 2018 in the then newly created position of director of channels for France, French-speaking territories, Africa and Israel. I am in charge of all editorial activity for WarnerMedia's youth and entertainment brands for these territories, a brief that includes marketing, communication and digital media.

## ■ Interesting. So, where are you based?

We have a full dedicated African team including marketing, comms, digital and programming, operating our channels from Paris, France. The WarnerMedia Africa team works very closely with a number of African-based agencies, studios and partners such as MultiChoice to ensure our brands are relevant across sub-Saharan Africa.

## ■ Ok, so tell us about WarnerMedia's business model and strategy for the African market.

We are driven by the ambition to develop local kids' content that resonates with our African audience, continuing to offer them the best in live action and animation content. With the increase of multiple-platform consumption, we are extending

our innovation beyond the creation of programmes and have come up with engaging consumer experiences, allowing them to watch and interact with our brands on the go, making our content available 24/7. This model is great for our millennial fan base who require 'TV Everywhere' apps to ensure easy access to their favourite shows.

WarnerMedia has distribution agreements with leading African TV platforms in all regions, and we will continue expanding on our entertainment offering by further developing our presence across the continent. For example, we recently introduced Cartoon Network and TNT on MultiChoice's digital terrestrial television (DTT) platform, GOtv.

We also have plans to further develop our presence in key markets like Nigeria and Kenya through local marketing initiatives and content production.

■ ***And tell us more about Discop, and WarnerMedia's involvement in this year's event?***

Discop is an industry-recognised platform that helps us to strengthen and build relationships with existing and potential buyers, and marketing and distribution partners. It is also a good place to identify emerging local talent to collaborate with on new projects. We're also focused on developing our network for distribution expansion across the continent, bringing our content to more fans and audiences, on more screens across Africa.

We were involved in two panel discussions at Discop this year. In the first panel discussion, we presented how international television channels, such as Cartoon Network, Boomerang or TNT work to create a brand experience that feels relevant for a local African audience. The second panel discussion, titled 'The Business of Animation', is where we delved into the history and economy of animation.

This year, however, what we were most excited about was the reveal of the three winning animated shorts from our Cartoon Network Africa Creative Lab competition. The initiative, which started in June 2018, as a pan-African call for pitch competition, not only had the ambition to find African talents and bring to life local story gems through animation but also unearth talent from a range of backgrounds. We were exceptionally proud to premiere these locally animated content pieces at Discop this year!



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■ ***Ok, so with regard to the first panel discussion around creating relevant brands for African audiences, mention some of the topics of discussion.***

The panellists focused on localisation, discussing it from all points of angles relevant for our business: through on-air programming that resonates with local habits and celebrations, local languages, communication and marketing that is up-to-date with local trends, to collaborating with local partners, as well as creating original local content.

The session developed specifically on Cartoon Network's ambition to create animation content in Africa, by bringing recent partners and talents from Cartoon Network Africa's Creative Lab to a roundtable and discussion, as well as revealing the three winning shorts.

■ ***And what in your opinion is required to create relevant brands for African audiences?***

If there's one thing Africans do really well, it is the ability to laugh at themselves! Taking advantage of Africa's humorous streak, and incredible storytelling abilities, it is about creating characters, heroes and heroines that kids from Africa can resonate with, whether it is through local language and accents, tone of voice or image. It is giving African kids a sense of belonging and another reason to be proud to be African.

■ ***The keyword here is relevance – comment on the importance of relevance in such a competitive and highly segmented market.***

WarnerMedia is becoming a more data-driven media company, continually asking, "Are we relevant to our future consumers?" With the ever-changing consumer behaviour, our data and consumer insights team runs qualitative surveys, like our latest macro and micro trend review identifying trends amongst millennials and generation Alpha, conducted by Spark. The team provides actionable insights to ensure our brands deliver locally relevant content by adapting to our consumers' lives and fitting in with their daily routines. This is done by adjusting schedules, geo-localising communications, adapting our brand tone of voice and extending our innovation beyond the creation of programmes, coming up with engaging consumer experiences beyond our linear channels.

■ ***How do you think WarnerMedia is getting this right across its various brands/channels?***

We have a strong following on the continent and continually strive to create a viewing experience that resonates with our African audience.

We ensure our brands address our audience with the relevant tone of voice and image.

We have increased the number of local collaborations with local artists and brand ambassadors such as Toya Delazy, Africa's very own Powerpuff Girl, Dean Furman, 2019's CN Soccer Superfan ambassador, Mila Smith in our first-ever local Boomerang Tunes production and many more. We adapt our content slate to our African viewers. A year ago, we took the decision to fully rebrand TCM perceived as a classic movie channel to TNT and make this channel the destination for American blockbuster fans. And this pays off, as TNT is now the first movie channel in SA.

With our kids' multiplex, the success is also here, Cartoon Network and Boomerang, leading the pay-TV kids' segment in South Africa for 61 consecutive months, currently ranking number one and two respectively.

## ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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