

Q&A: Chris Gotz and Paul Newman on OFyt remaining independent and true to core mission

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Old Friends Young Talent's (OFyt) National Creative Director Chris Gotz and CEO Paul Newman discuss the company's recent decision to remain independent, how they are staying true to their core mission of finding and encouraging talent that has been denied the normal "privileged" entrance to advertising, as well as the impact of Covid-19 and the outlook of the advertising industry for 2021...



Chris Gotz



Paul Newman

1. Tell us a bit about OFyt, how did it all begin?

Paul Newman: OFyt started when a few agency heavyweights set up their own independent agency around 10 years ago. The Young Talent we talk about in the agency's name, are our interns: talented graduates from all walks of life. We try and find talent that has been denied the normal "privileged" entrance to advertising. They get to work with these industry heavyweights, really closely, so there is this amazing transfer of skills and knowledge that happens both ways. At our heart, that's what still drives us today. It's what has driven all of our growth.

2. OFyt was set to join the Publicis Group a few months ago but decided to remain independent. Why?

Newman: Unfortunately, as 2020 unfolded, the impact of the pandemic on our business became clearer. The transaction depended on decent growth, so for both parties, it was no longer viable. We've retained our independence and continue, with our client base intact, as OFyt. The deal was cancelled by mutual agreement.

3. OFyt believes in fast-tracking young, disadvantaged talent, and runs a successful internship programme. Tell us more about the programme; how it works, who can apply, and the benefits of the programme overall?

Chris Gotz: Developing young talent is a big part of why we exist.

We started our graduate/intern programme in 2013 and since then have put over 80 youngsters through the programme, many of whom have gone on to carve a successful career in advertising, either with us or with other agencies. We have developed talent contributing to the wider industry. Our interns have ended up in all sorts of companies. A lot of them stay with us, of course. The programme runs over 12 months and is SETA approved. They work in integrated teams on real, live projects in the agency. There is huge satisfaction in watching young talent evolve and grow, developing their level of experience that allows them to grow and spread their wings. To qualify for the OFyt graduate/intern programme, prospects must hold an NQF level 5 or equivalent diploma or degree preferably in a relevant business or creative qualification.

4. Tell us about the most memorable work that your combination of young talent and experienced advertising professionals has produced.

Gotz: There's lots of stuff we're very proud of. We've done some outstanding work on Prudential recently, and we've been on a bit of a brand journey with Kia as well. Our work has a distinctly local flavour, and a fresh relevance. Coming up with those ideas wouldn't be possible without the range and diversity of talent we have at OFyt. The intern programme is the nucleus of that.

5. How has Covid-19 and the lockdown affected the way you work, as well as the type of work you do? Are you noticing any specific trends?

Gotz: Our business is not ideally suited for remote working. Everything gets better when we're together. We collaborate more fluidly; we talk naturally about the work and the issues around it. But we seem to have found a rhythm in this new way of working. You must watch that it doesn't become a kind of depressing parade of emails and zoom reviews.

People are hugely adaptive, especially our younger talent, and the agency is performing as well as ever. It sounds boring but a really strong operations hub and an all-inclusive communication platform is vital. And laughter, that's vital too. Luckily zoom calls give us lots of subject matter.

6. What are some of your predictions for the advertising industry for 2021?

Newman: If we had answered that question 8 weeks ago, it might have been quite bullish. Maybe some growth in the second quarter of 2021?

Now though, it's clear Covid-19 will continue to make a damn mess of the world at least until the middle of the year. As vaccine rollout programmes develop and we feel better, there will soon be rose-tinted think-pieces about coming growth and prosperity. Mistrust them.

7. Any advice for aspiring individuals who would like to get involved/grow in the industry?

Gotz: Never agree to work for free. You are worth more than that. Even if it's your first job.

All of our interns are paid a salary which is SETA approved. Unpaid internships, which are common in the ad and design industry, simply favour privileged individuals who have access to extensive financial support. If you're a recent graduate in absolutely anything, and fancy a job in advertising, design or PR, then send us a mail at info@ofyt.co.za.

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