

Grid goes to Coachella

 By Jessica Tennant

29 May 2018

Grid Worldwide introduced an incentive to send the two team members to Coachella 2018 who would make the most meaningful contribution to building its cultural insights capability. Senior designer Wade Moonsamy and creative director S.J. Naude were the two that made the cut.

The [Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival](#) is an annual music and arts festival held at the Empire Polo Club in Indio, California that takes place over two weekends in April.

“We chose Coachella because it is one of the most progressive festivals that combines music, design and street culture into one week. The intention was to immerse them into the heart of global trends and culture and then for them to bring the inspiration back to South Africa and inject it into the agency,” says CEO and partner Adam Byars.



Wade Moonsamy and S.J. Naude.

Here, Byars goes on to explain this further, the relevance of the Festival to the ad world; while Moonsamy and Naude share their experience of the event, how it's completely different to our local Oppikoppi and Africa Burn and why it taught them to step outside the box of conventional branding...

⌘ **How is Coachella relevant to the ad world?**

Byars: Relevance is fleeting. You constantly need to have your finger on the pulse of an ever-changing world and make sure you keep up with culture. You also need to think outside the box and not constrain yourself to traditional means of communication. Brands like HP are utilising spaces like Coachella to present experiences rather than renting billboards to punt product. The closer you can get to your audience, the more responsive they become.

⌘ **That said, why would you encourage ad men to attend and why?**

Byars: Definitely. Travel, in general, broadens the mind and opens your world. The mere fact of being in an entirely different country changes the context in which we view things and the way we see brands behaving. Even with the vast reach of the internet at our disposal, you experience completely different approaches to branding, advertising and marketing in general, once you leave the borders of your home.

In a country like the US, that is so focused on capitalism, this becomes truly evident almost everywhere you go. Brands are just pushing boundaries in terms of communication and operation, it's becoming harder and harder to not only keep up, but actually lead the pack.

“ In terms of attending Coachella specifically: a resounding YES! Less for boring business purposes, and more for the absolute pleasure of the experience. Chilling out in the middle of the desert, surrounded by amazing artists and 160,000+ individuals from all walks of life and all corners of the globe, is a total mindf*ck. ”

Once again, a massive shoutout to Grid Worldwide for awarding us this amazing opportunity!



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⌘ **Wade and S.J, when did you hear you were going to Coachella?**

Moonsamy and Naude: We found out at the Grid year-end function at the end of 2017. It was hinted that there might be an opportunity to head to Coachella all year, but the details were never really discussed and we never really expected it to actually happen. Needless to say, minds were blown...

⌘ **What did you expect of the Festival?**

Moonsamy and Naude: Apart from the artists, we were really interested in seeing how they would present the festival and how it would match up to local experiences like Oppikoppi and Africa Burn. The hype around Coachella is massive every year, so it had a lot to live up to.

“ You always see pictures of scantily clad flower children, massive sculptures in the desert and huge stage performances, but, honestly, nothing could have prepared us for the sensory overload of the actual event. ”

We are both Oppikoppi veterans, but this was a completely different vibe and feel. From the insane stage designs (seriously, google “Sahara stage 2018”), to the installations and the insanely diverse group of people swarming about, every moment was just a flood of amazing things to see and hear.



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📌 **What were the most interesting trends you noticed that you're starting to implement Grid?**

Moonsamy and Naude: Not just at Coachella, but in LA and America in general, there seems to be a trend of **unbranding**. Brands like Supreme and Kith are getting their brand out there by stepping outside the box of conventional branding. At popup shops, that only open once a week, you can buy Supreme hammers and baseball gloves together with high-end clothing. Kith sells (ridiculously priced) milkshakes together with designer shirts.

“ Art and design really is becoming more of a ‘street’ statement rather than following the more traditional approach of ‘logo, TV ad, pullup banner’. ”

If your brand is not relevant and constantly evolving, you can forget about staying in the public consciousness. Come to think of it, the same could be said of the artists at Coachella.

Beyoncé could have simply sung her most famous songs and still killed it, but instead, she chose to put on a massive spectacle. Her performance included references to pop culture. She spoke about social happenings and made each member of that audience fall in love with her as a brand (even if you didn't like the music).

Eminem put on a showstopping performance by bringing out Dr Dre and 50 Cent, but directly commented on how people are starting to see him as irrelevant. Alt J played all their old songs, but their stage design was an almost surreal, interactive experience.

The popup experiences at Coachella were also much more focused on the interactive and the social. Some tents were limited access (catering to this generation's seeming love of exclusive or elite experiences). The HP tent combined tech with traditional media, but it was directly aimed at social media exposure.

At Grid, we are aiming to break into that trend of constantly evolving our approach and touching on current and coming culture to remain relevant. Even for more formal clients like FNB, we are trying to (and have to) push the envelope of the traditional.

“ You can't just put out a great TV ad and expect the masses to come storming your gates anymore. You need to be fluid, interactive, adaptive and open to what the public has to say about you. ”

Like the bands at Coachella, you need to constantly evolve your tune, as it were, to keep building your fan base.



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📌 **Coachella is famous for its melting box of talent and diversity. What were your stand out experiences?**

Moonsamy and Naude: Where do we even start! Getting to be front row, centre, right up against the stage for amazing acts like Jacob Banks, Alt J, Nothing but Thieves, Fleet Foxes, Django Django and A Perfect Circle.

Being pulled into an insane mosh pit during Flatbush Zombies' killer set. Witnessing the majesty of Eminem bringing Dr Dre and 50 Cent on stage to rap with him. Hearing 160,000 people rap (without missing a beat) to every song Eminem and co. spat out.

Hiding from the sun in the VIP area's rose garden (SJ is, after all, ginger, and the sun is his mortal enemy).

Seeing the infamous scantily clad flower children (seriously, you could barely make one large T-shirt from the material they

were collectively wearing).

And lastly, but most importantly, surviving the six-hour Greyhound bus trip back to LA.

Exhausted, sore and hungover, but fulfilled and inspired.

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