

# An unlikely client-agency partnership

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Once there was a retail brand in dire need of reform - its stores were 30 years old and needed a makeover desperately, it had no e-commerce or online presence. Essentially it was broken.



Image supplied

Katherine Madley, the vice president of marketing for the brand, Game, knew what was needed: someone who could turn the brand around, but she also knew this was a task akin to turning the Titanic around in the Suez Canal.

“Yet, I also knew this was the opportunity to do something huge,” she says.

## A meeting of minds

It would also be the beginning of an unlikely but great partnership between the retail brand and a creative agency.

Sbu Sitole, cofounder and chief creative officer of The Odd Number is honest when he talks about the agency. “We had not worked with a retail brand before. Our experience was mainly ATL.”

But, he says they asked themselves how they could transform a retail brand beyond just price point and product.

## Creativity is everything

What would be key to this relationship is Madley's view on creativity. Ask her what creativity means to her and her answer is simple: "Everything."

She quotes a 500 FMCG Retail Companies research source on Return on Marketing (ROM) over 15 years. "47% of ROM is from creativity and that's massive."

Madley, who has a financial services background before joining Game, says early in her career she would study advertising and marketing in sources such as *AdVantage* magazine and listen to what great creatives like John Hunt were saying and what great advertisements were being created.

"I go to great lengths to understand creativity. I am enchanted by it, and I know that if you bring creativity into a business then you will succeed," she says.

## Building trust

With this in mind, she created an enabling environment on the corporate side for the agency. On the agency side, the Odd Number team has endeavoured to understand Game's legal and procurement processes.

"The Odd Number has not seen our corporate processes as stumbling blocks, as so many agencies do, instead they have worked to understand these. The result is that we have developed a deep respect for each other," says Madley.

## Wanting the thunder

Sitole is frank about Madley. "She is tough. She would say to me, Sbu, I want the thunder. She would also say if legal is not being called in then we are not doing our job. But we love that. It showed the bravery of a brand that was basically on its knees."

Once the agency had figured out the brand positioning, Madley asked The Odd Number to tackle the redesign of the stores.

"Redesigning the customer journey in-store was an immersive experience that showed us the customer's steps from television to till or the moment of purchase. It was not anything that we had attempted before, and it certainly is not something any other advertising agency has done before as far as I am aware."

## Direct access

For him the relationship is so successful because of the direct access to the client. “There are no debriefs on envelopes. I can pick up the phone or WhatsApp Madley anytime and that’s why it works.”

The Odd Number team also has access to the Game exco team. “It is important to have time with the broader team with what is actually happening on the ground,” says Sitole.

This, despite what Madley calls differing definitions of what a deadline is by her and Sitole!

This is the fourth year of the relationship between Game and the Odd Number, but Sitole says they are not done. “We are not where we want to be. I have high ambitions for the brand and ourselves. We are still on a journey with the brand.”

Madley and Sitole were talking at the Loeries Creative Week Masterclass.

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## ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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