How The One Club Stepped Up in 2020

Kevin Swanepoel, CEO of the One Club for Creativity, thinks the organization he leads has a bit of an image problem.

Despite being behind events such as Where Are All The Black People, an annual multicultural career fair that's run for more than 10 years, Swanepoel said he still believes many in the industry solely view it as an awards hub.

"One of our biggest frustrations as an organization is [that] it's so misunderstood that the One Club is just awards," he said.

To be fair, it's true that its long-running One Show and ADC Awards are the One Club's bread and butter. But this year, perhaps more than any other, the One Club proved that it's capable of much more than organizing juries and hosting lavish awards galas in New York.

Throughout 2020, the One Club, which positions itself as a nonprofit dedicated to supporting and celebrating the "success of the global creativity community," has leaned into the year's challenges with a proactive mindset that's helped it contribute solutions to some of the industry's biggest problems.

For instance, in response to the nation's racial reckoning, it worked with Spotify creative director Oriel Davis-Lyons to build One School, a free, 16-week portfolio program for Black creatives.

Later in the year, it collaborated with Seattle's School of

Visual Concepts to debut 2nd Skill, a virtual nine-month bootcamp geared towards creatives who may be struggling to find work or looking to "future-proof" their careers.

Swanepoel claims people in the industry have "sat up and noticed" the One Club's efforts, especially in a year where many organizations have pulled back or struggled to stay afloat.

"I've got some really heartfelt emails from very senior people in the industry," he said. "For me, that is so heartwarming because it means that people are taking notice of what we are about."

Getting it done

Applications for 2nd Skill close on Jan. 17, so interest in the program remains to be seen. But the One School, which launched in July, has experienced overwhelming demand, so much so that the One Club is currently working on ways to continue expanding it in 2021.

The One School initially accepted 15 students in its inaugural fall course, which began in September. Shortly afterwards, the One Club expanded the virtual school to the West Coast to allow for more students. According to the One Club, 30 students have already completed the fall course, and it plans to graduate even more next year as it widens its footprint.

Yash Egami, vice president of content and marketing at the One Club, said the school was created to stop agencies from claiming they can't find Black creatives.

"The tired expression is, 'we don't know where to find talent.' By creating this pipeline, we are saying, 'there's no excuse,'" Egami explained. "We are helping this talent and helping agencies identify this talent. We're not solving the problem, but we're helping agencies solve that problem."

Bob Isherwood, professional development director at the One Club, said the nonprofit also reached out to applicants who didn’t make the cut this fall and invited them to participate in a six-week mentorship program. Isherwood said 79 Black creatives took part, receiving guidance from mentors at agencies including DDB, McCann and R/GA.

Participants worked on two briefs throughout the program. According to Isherwood, the hope is that they can use said briefs if or when they choose to reapply to One School.

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