Ivan May — marketing hero

Dr Ivan May was one of the most irritating men I’ve ever met, and every time I saw him I told him so. One might meet to discuss a concept, an idea, an article. He’d listen intently, and then with surgical precision would deconstruct and rebuild the issue with strategic insight and creative brilliance so that you knew it could only have a positive outcome. One was inevitably left frustrated at one’s own limitations and in awe of his. Then he’d say: “More thought, young man, and more reading.” He was an intellectual resource that I used shamelessly and I’m going to miss his clever conversation, insight – and, when the second cappuccino was finished, a little light industry gossip. Boy, did Ivan know a thing or two about everybody! Ivan died at the age of 63 after a five-month battle with cancer. The marketing and philanthropic community instantly lost a gentle, well-dressed and well-spoken giant.

Born in Johannesburg on 23 August 1947, he attended the King Edward VII School before going to the University of the Witwatersrand, from which institution he graduated with five degrees including a Doctorate of Philosophy in 1974. At the time of his death, he was president of the Convocation of the University of the Witwatersrand. He was chairperson of the Advisory Board of The Salvation Army, chairperson of Charities Aid Foundation Southern Africa (CAFSA), and a former vice-chancellor of the Order of St John, of which Order he was also a knight. He was responsible for bringing the CowParade to South Africa, through which a substantial amount was raised for the Childhood Cancer Foundation South Africa (CHOC). At the time of his death he was, among others, the chief executive of 1485 Radio Today, a non-executive director of the Vodacom Foundation, a member of the Council of the University of Witwatersrand, a non-executive director of the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa, and a member of the King 3 Committee on Corporate Governance. Dr May was also the creative mind and driving force behind the creation of a number of affinity products launched by his then employer, Nedbank, and was a founder and board member of a number of trusts established concurrently with the green, arts and culture and sports affinity products in the 1990s.

Ivan received dozens of awards and accolades during his lifetime. He was a Fellow of the Institute of Marketing Management, a World Fellow of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, amongst others. His awards included a Gold Medal from the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Captain Scott Memorial Medal from the South African Biological Society, and the Exceptional Service Award from the Advertising Standards Authority. Friend and publicist, Theo Coggin, was quoted as saying: “Dr May celebrated Christmas quietly with some of his closest friends who enjoyed his usual lively and creative discourse, and were struck by his commitment to a diary for 2011 that, in the true Ivan May tradition, was already brimful of appointments, all aimed at serving those in society whom he loved and respected. Many people in South Africa will bear tribute to his gift of mentoring, and his generosity in sharing his considerable knowledge and skills. Through his own generosity, he called forth generosity in others.”

Ivan – The Journal, its readers and advertisers salute you.