

up&up group



BIOGRAPHY | Mike Abel

Mike Abel is the Founding Partner and Executive Chairman of The Up&Up Group, Africa's largest independent marketing, communications and strategic advisory firms, recognised for its creativity, values and impact.

Across more than 35 years in brand-building, advertising and business leadership, Mike has become one of South Africa's most influential creative and strategic voices. He has led agencies on two continents – serving as Group CEO of M+C Saatchi Australia and as Group COO of Ogilvy South Africa – before returning home to build what would become the defining chapter of his career. He sat on the global M+C Saatchi Exco, driving

the creative and innovation agenda and on the global Ogilvy Top 30 brains trust (based out of New York) guiding and directing the evolution and strategy of that network.

In 2010, he founded M+C Saatchi Abel, which became the fastest-growing agency in South African history, reshaping the local communications landscape. Over the next decade, he and his partners grew the business into a seven-company African group, earning a reputation as the “jewel in the crown” of the global M+C Saatchi network.

In 2025, Mike led the management buyout that transformed the business from a multinational network agency into a proudly independent African group, The Up&Up Group – comprising M+C Saatchi Abel, Razor, Levergy, Connect, 2Stories, Black & White Consulting, and Dalmatian.

Today the Group employs over 500 people and partners with many of the continent's leading brands.

Beyond advertising, Mike is widely recognised as a public thinker and moral voice. His long-form writing on leadership, values, responsible capitalism and creativity reaches millions each month across LinkedIn, X and Substack. His essays and commentary have positioned him as one of the country's most influential business voices, blending strategic clarity with humanity, humour and moral courage.

A passionate advocate for social impact, Mike is a co-creator of The Street Store – the world's first rent-free, pop-up clothing store for the homeless – which has been



hosted more than 1,100 times globally and clothed more than a million people. He advises and supports numerous NGOs, and educational initiatives, driven by a lifelong commitment to equity, dignity and opportunity.

In 2025, he was recognised by the South African advertising industry with two noteworthy awards.

The Financial Mail Lifetime Achiever Award is associated with the Financial Mail AdFocus Awards, representing industry recognition at the highest level in South Africa. Mike received the Lifetime Achiever Award, the most prestigious recognition for an individual, which is presented to an iconic industry leader who has made extraordinary, sustained, and profoundly positive contributions to advertising and marketing over the course of their career.

Mike graduated from the AAA School of Advertising in 1989, one of South Africa's leading advertising industry educational institutions. He was presented with the inaugural Alumnus Luminary Award, recognising his contribution to creativity, leadership, transformation and nation-building.

Mike is a sought-after keynote speaker and a regularly published columnist, podcast host and author of the book *'Willing & Abel'*.

Rooted in South Africa, inspired by the world, and guided by an unwavering belief in creativity and kindness, Mike Abel continues to be both a defining voice in the industry - and a guiding one in the country.