

Advertising: global vs South Africa

How co-creation and intuition should be infused in strategic thinking.

By Daniel Scheffler

This world has swerved towards the factor of one, the symbol of the all mighty solo philosopher and fearless warrior. One internet, one vision, one power. In Grecian times the One was part of the gods, in the romantic Middle Ages the One was the church; consequently the burden was laid upon one to carry this One as You. The centre of the world had become you. Possibly the heresy pressure or the ironic loneliness gave rise to a real need for connections; to connect the One with the masses. So the emergence of originally post doves and smoke signals, then telephones and pen pals, and eventually the Internet, Instant Messaging and Tivo. In effect: to connect the LAN with more than just other LANs. Thus, specific communication is generated but into all directions and so a harness is necessary. The 90s gave rise to minimalism and Guess Jeans so consumers discovered the need to cull back the excess fat and simplify their lives and needs. Consumers started to not only want media but be involved in that media; whether customising or controlling we were yet to see.

As we end the first decade of the new millennium, content creation and activation are significant in its relevance in a cross-industry approach. Do consumers YouTube alone for no-one to see? No. Consumers, and of course brands, create content to be shared, to be edited, to be loved and slated. Thus, presenting a cease fire in the dirty mess of communication's fight with itself where bombarding consumers with messages no longer holds validity. In true Fight Club style the communicators' self-punch was deeper than anticipated and consumers could of course wise up. Advertisers were now aware of areas where respect and validity come to fore. With models that include terms like Bought Media, Owned Media & Earned Media in the market. Each of the categories came with their own sets of merits and crises. Where can Advertising now influence, be revered, respected and taken to heart?

The advent of advertising was the media placement for a client to create an interface between consumer and product. This is no longer the case; advertising is now billed per hour and so are creative ideas. In its essence Advertising sells Concepts. With the rise of KPIs and ROIs: the need to measure results has become pivotal to success with clients. This process watered down creativity, faked innovation and ignited pseudo successes.

South Africa is the last bastion of traditional Advertising; where archaic terms for instance Above The Line & Below The Line are still informing the creative minds and utilised across agencies. Possibly eliminate the cigarettes, womanising and alcohol decadence from Mad Men's 60s enactment and you have a representation of the current South African industry. From the South African consumer's often uneducated perspective this is not seen as critical. The South African consumer tolerates advertising where as world-wide consumers have resented advertising for its bombastic bad punk attitude. A perfect example is the evolution of Pay Per View and Tivo where the self-anointed global consumer is again on the couch of his dreams, holding his beloved smart phone in one hand and a personalised digital magazine on iPad in the other with choice in multiplex. This consumer has shaped the execution of advertising, where agencies and consultancies internationally have retaliated with a metamorphic collaboration with consumers and thus truly delivering on inherent needs.

South Africa has dealt with this situation very differently; the media that has traction is the mobile phone ranging from cheap Nokia to Blackberry and the industry here is still figuring out how to strategically approach the dichotomy of economics and socio-economics. With the swell of the internet on global scale, the targeting of media has suddenly completely remodelled. Internationally the traditional ways of segmenting markets are no longer relevant as the internet has changed the consumer behaviour pattern forever. South Africa reclines itself in a position of part first world, part third world where the harnessing of the broad expanse of consumerism is completely unique.

The era of the micro is now changing shape again. We have followed micro communities, micro communications, micro targeting and micro ideas in advertising as we know it and have made love to it. With specialising and customising the freefall of Advertising is happening right now. Agencies globally rely on research houses to provide insight, to help fight the fight, act as a defence. The critique of this is that research is not based on predictions but based on existing information; not on real consumer desires.

Where as the focus of Advertising into the new era should be on the reframed objective. This is where the essential problem lies and solving this with an analysis of beliefs and inherent behaviour is essential; opposed to solving it with pseudo insight. This brings about a compelling gap: between what we think we know and what we actually know. After all, Advertising should influence people; otherwise it is not worth the combat. This influence is not based on anything affected; it's based on intuition and delivering on that. By challenging the One and its opponents in this gap it makes this real and not theoretical or executed but truly strategic and that is what is core for the industry.

In truth, no ONE truly knows what it to come.