

Data-led creativity: A marriage that won't separate brands and customers

By [Charl van Rooyen](#)

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Ten times more content is needed today than a decade ago. Gone are the days of traditional targeting and random media distribution. To truly make an impact in today's noisy world, brands must start embracing data and draw insight from all available sources, including past campaigns, to better understand and target customers on a 1:1 basis.

But...isn't data and the creative process complete polar opposites? At first glance, it seems to be the case. But by combining these two resources, brands can create meaningful connections. Data is rational, creativity seems irrational; data is knowledge, and creativity is a product of imagination.



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However, using data to inform the creative process helps to take brand campaigns to the next level. In fact, if you have the data, and you have the means to analyse and extract insight from it, the more understanding of what content and what connections you want to make will come from it.

Data is creativity's ally

Even if you don't realise it, data already plays a massive role in creative decision-making, but normally, data-based decisions are made about business objectives - not creative processes. The trick is to start thinking about data differently and utilise it in more than one department - especially in content creation.

Content marketing expert Greg Weinstein, a founding partner of *The Times*, says that “...technological advancements in market research can supercharge the creative process by providing rich insights into highly targeted niche consumer groups. When used correctly, data is not the enemy of creative; it can be its most powerful ally.”

I completely agree with this statement. Data-led advertising has quickly grown to become one of the biggest contributors to the digital advertising realm. Mostly because, with the strategic use of data that brands already own, they can reach targeted audiences with customised messages at the ideal moments - the moments when your connections make important decisions.



This, along with personalised content, can be a powerful tool to deliver effective campaigns that drive desired actions from audiences. Finding the right balance between leveraging data and creativity at the same level of importance can be hard. But it's important to keep in mind that the integration of the two is becoming more important, especially to optimise engagement, human impact and sales.

Closing the communication cycle

My topline guidelines for brands that want to serve the right content to the right customer and ensure their communication executions are constantly evolving are to:

- Drill down and focus on a theme or topic where your creative content will make an impact;
- Connect with people in moments and places of high emotion and energy, which will increase the profitability of your message;
- Add energy to campaigns, or subtly develop or adjust content in parallel with real-world events, allowing emotions to be turned into action;

- Build anticipation over several stages of the campaign by holding the audience's attention over a period of time;
- Continue engaging with audiences after a campaign has peaked;
- Use past campaign performance as a guide for optimisation, and;
- Use split tests to ensure you understand why one creative performs better than another.

The biggest oversight, in my opinion, is not closing the communication loop. Although many agencies claim to craft digitally-led connections, very few (if any) use data after the first phase of their creative process. Once creative has been sent into the digital sphere, it should be seen as malleable. If data shows that the creative needs to be adapted in order to create even more effective connections, the content should evolve. Creative and creativity is not a stagnant thing.

A match made in media heaven

This is how MediaCom stands out. By being the first agency in Africa to use a data-led approach in creating and distributing creative content. We create the right connections and then serve the right content at the right time (not just at the beginning of a creative process).

We achieve this by implementing historic insights and future targeting, and then creating and managing high-performing creatives and campaigns that are catered to individuals, as opposed to large, awkward audiences. We do this because we believe that you will only reach real humans with real problems by using data-led communication tactics like these. And at the end of the day, it's all about reaching and engaging people.

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