

# It's time to shift the media research paradigm

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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If you're a parent, you'll know that profound feeling of awe when you wake up one day to find your kids have suddenly grown up overnight.

Your little boy, who only yesterday was watching KTV and collecting things out of cereal boxes and potato chip packets, has suddenly got the beginnings of a moustache and a voice that has dropped from sounding like a wheel on an out of kilter supermarket trolley to something a lot closer to Darth Vader.

And your little girl with those trusting, loving eyes, dressing and re-dressing her Barbie Doll and looking so damn cute in a pair of pigtails, suddenly has breasts and an attitude.

Nothing is planned, there's no specific timing; it just kind of dawns on you one day that life has taken a quantum leap forward.

Now, this is precisely the feeling I have about the media and advertising industries.

## It's a feeling

I don't have any hard evidence, just a kind of gut feel I've developed after 40 years in the business and having raised four kids.

Something tells me that all of a sudden the South African consumer has woken up to the fact that there is life beyond mere survival. And that being well informed can pay the rent.

Media consumption should have started to go up as more and more South Africans realised that newspapers, radio, and television could offer them something more than inane chat shows, Big Brother, and what's on at the movies.

Local consumers, I reckon, are eventually going to become a lot more interested in what makes this country tick and what makes Barack Obama behave as though flying ants invaded his Y-fronts.

But of course, media consumption isn't simply going to rocket just because the South African consumer wants to be better informed.

The media are going to have to play along as well and give them what they want.

And to do this they're going to have to come up with far more efficient ways of conducting readership, viewership and listenership research.

Right now, the factors and margins of error are too big to be trusted - which is why so many editors and programmers still work on the basis of gut feel.

## **There needs to be a shift...**

Quite simply, a huge paradigm shift is needed when it comes to extracting information from the consumer about what he or she wants to read, listen to, and watch.

Old formulae need to be tossed out and far more subtle and craftier methods need to be developed to get consumers to play ball.

Now, talking about advertising, here again I have the feeling that business in South Africa has matured with regard to marketing in general and advertising in particular.

I'm not saying it's got Dolly Parton boobs yet but, like that little girl with pigtails, I think business has started wearing makeup and is at least in a training bra when it comes to accepting that marketing is mildly important in the greater scheme of things.

I get the impression that the current economic downturn along with a radical increase in levels of competition and deregulation in South Africa have made a lot of businesses start looking at what they have to do to keep afloat after so many years of cruising along profitably in a protective cocoon.

## **The ad industry has something to prove**

More and more business media are devoting more and more space to marketing these days. Even politicians are talking about brands and communication and using marketing-speak almost as much as they do invective.

But here again, the industry, particularly the advertising industry, has to play ball. It really needs to send a message to business that the ad industry is not there for the sole purpose of giving young guys access to top-of-the-range Porsches. They need to send a message that advertising is not all about barefooted, ponytailed freaks coming up with ideas that will blow the socks of TV viewers and newspaper readers.

The ad industry needs to take advantage of the unprecedented attention business is giving it by proving and publicising day in and day out that advertising is an investment and a serious and important part of the economy.

Like politicians who trash brand South Africa and chase away foreign investors and tourists when they make really stupid one-upmanship statements, so does the ad industry trash itself when it leaps into stupid offensive ads without thinking. It has to reassure prospective clients that it's not about knocking the socks off consumers but rather about making them take out their wallets out and say, "Help yourself..."

## **ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK**

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on [moerdyk@gmail.com](mailto:moerdyk@gmail.com) and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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