

Digital agency trends to live by in 2016 revisited

 By [Stephen Sandmann](#)

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We are almost halfway into 2016 so I thought it would be interesting to revisit my thoughts from January this year about [digital agency trends](#). My findings were most interesting.



Don't babble

This remains true. Just check yourself before you launch into *Back to the Future* movie-sounding lingo. I need to expand on the definition of 'digi-babble'; to paraphrase a recent chat, which I had with Quirk CEO and colleague Rob Stokes. Focus on the benefits associated with your idea and not on its features. For example, your idea sounds innovative but what are the benefits? How would my company benefit from carrying out your idea?

Creativity is not only for creatives

This is an exciting topic and glaringly relevant. When it comes to digital, I believe data-driven ideas are key to practical benefit-laden ideas. While a talking dog is an easy win for traditional advertising (cute right?), how does it translate into digital? What consumer-related data drove that concept into life? X amount of South Africans love dogs? Will cat lovers hate the adverts? How does this translate online? Online-related consumer data can't be ignored in today's digital age, with the appropriate target market in mind of course.

Since my last article, I have witnessed an excellent example of this. For a recent campaign, I did substantial research, and came up with broad mechanics, as well as top-line concept executions. Our creatives then adapted these wonderfully into brilliant campaign ideas, that were effective from every perspective. A scary thought is that I recently went through the latest client-specific traditional research conducted by a respectable, global research firm, which excluded Google / search engine usage or any useful digital insights. I love the way Google sets out its research (Think with Google), that is useful and covers real life scenarios.

I believe that technical, yet creative, conceptual thinkers play an important role when it comes to developing ideas. Let these technical folks develop the mechanics of your idea first. Then overlay and adapt this 'skeleton' with an engaging 'body' (the big idea); instead of the other way round. I'll elaborate. When it comes to digital, it can be quite technical.

So an idea might sound great to the non-technically minded person (e.g. a hologram), but how does it reach the client's digital objectives (how does it benefit them?), short of just being a gimmicky activation stunt?

When it comes to client service, I believe that everyone needs to understand the situation that they're in, each day, dealing with client and internal agency production. Share your insights with client service, take the time to explain to them why you need more time or why something must be done a certain way.

Work together

This requires concerted effort from three internal agency teams, namely, the suits, technical 'production' folk and the creatives. They all need to meet somewhere in the middle. This, I believe comes down to each team knowing enough about the other teams. For example, the suits must, where possible, push back for more time, so as to give the creatives and technical folk enough time to create exceptional work. The technical teams need to respect the importance of an overarching creative concept; a mechanic alone won't make up a successful future campaign.

Digital-lead advertising

It isn't about jumping on the bandwagon. It is about creating forward-thinking solutions that effectively cut through competing clutter. Keep at it, don't give up - the great ones are worth the effort. An exceptional consumer insight and research can drive an innovative concept. Don't be scared, just prove the concept is viable.

There is massive power in combining data-driven traditional advertising with digital marketing techniques. For example, humble food-packing can be turned into a powerful, engaging online campaign, driving incredible online consumer engagement on an ongoing basis. That TV ad endboard copy you're about to get signed off - does it just sound snappy or did you base it on data that predicts that it will be engaging to consumers?

Digital spend is too low

I have a new point to raise. I've noticed many traditional advertising campaigns executed in our country, across all major categories. However, their online components lag behind in terms of their financial support. I've been lucky enough not to experience this myself. Brands need to spend more on digital to stay ahead, period. It is amazing how effective and efficient digital can be. For example, there is a lot of tactical digital advertising one could do if a brand would just sacrifice a few big billboards, over 12 months. One only has to attend various digital advertising award shows to see the incredible work various digital agencies accomplished on small budgets (imagine if they had sizeable budgets!).

I also think that correctly executed digital marketing would engage with many more people. Case in point, who notices billboards these days, enough for their messaging to work in any case? In my daily commute, I couldn't really care less about billboards that appear along the way. Quite frankly an alien space ship could land next to the highway and I probably wouldn't notice it.

Most of all, when it comes to digital, I'd be able to back it up with tangible data. Don't get me wrong - traditional advertising is not to be understated but digital definitely needs more of the clients' marketing spend. Brands need to look at traditional and digital advertising as tools in the same toolbox.

So, there you go, my humble thoughts on the world of digital marketing in SA.

ABOUT STEPHEN SANDMANN

I have a keen interest in innovative, digital marketing-lead advertising and search marketing (SEO and paid search), which I've developed through my award-winning agency and corporate career at Ogilvy, Quirk (now Mrum), Vodacom and now a specialist digital marketing consultant at Sandmann Digital.

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