

Today's kids will never know...

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If you've seen the hilarious tweets accompanying the hashtag, [#TodaysKidsWillNeverKnow](#), throwing back to the days of playing 'Snake' on a Nokia 3310 or walking around with a portable CD player stuffed in your backpack, you probably laughed, right before thinking, "Damn, I feel old." The smart devices we carry around now allow us to do so much more than we ever imagined possible, and how we listen to music, read books and watch our favourite TV shows has changed dramatically, seemingly overnight.



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The same goes for brands and businesses anxiously awaiting the next big wave of disruption, naturally on the lookout for the next big trend on the horizon. The current consumer landscape is an unpredictable and often confusing place, but that doesn't mean brands can afford to ignore the change that this new, more 'woke' marketplace brings. Here are a few insights we've gleaned while working in the advertising industry and starting up our own production collective.



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Real-life engagement is key

While the hype around virtual reality seems to be quietening down following a rather slow year in terms of new development and consumer adoption, the age of augmented reality (AR) is starting to take shape, particularly in how people are consuming and engaging with online content.

Unlike VR, which immerses users in 360-degree computer-generated environments, AR technology integrates digital elements with the real world, allowing users to engage with three-dimensional digital renderings in real-time. Pokémon GO gave us the first taste of this in 2016, which had us all running around catching imaginary cartoon critters, and Major Lazer and Bacardi got us excited in 2017 with the launch of two new Snapchat lenses, and plans to use people's augmented

selfies in the new front-of-the-line music video.

Local brands have also jumped on the trend, with Dulux introducing an [AR app that lets you visualise what a new shade of paint](#) would look like in any space before transforming your office, lounge or store.

AR technology offers consumers a fun, unique and, most importantly, accessible platform to engage with the world around them, introducing new and exciting ways to do everything from socialising to shopping for a new couch.

Considered content creation is king

Leveraging existing social platforms in new and exciting ways to provide consumers with unique, engaging and memorable experiences, and distributing content that is relevant within the context of each respective channel, will be a huge priority for brands in 2018. It's also vital to maintain consistency to ensure every touchpoint of the brand – from online channels to brick-and-mortar stores – is taken into consideration when creating content.

Content needs to feel personal in a way that makes consumers feel like they are the focus of the brand's attention. People are increasingly attracted to the type of content that elicits emotion and has personal appeal, and brands will continue to leverage insights and data gathered from marketing campaigns to achieve this. Creating different versions of a piece of content specifically targeted at smaller market segments, as well as using AI and machine learning is key when it comes to creating this type of content, and these methods will become more widely used in 2018.

In addition, brands will start to reassess how they use the insights provided from these campaigns, placing more value on telling a story to help consumers feel connected to the brand and less on marketing for marketing's sake and creating

content for the sake of a new trend.

Consumers will continue to call brands on their BS

We don't have to tell you how connected and in-tune consumers are when it comes to the political, social and economic circumstances facing South Africa and the world at large. Anyone with access to the internet has a voice, and they aren't afraid to use it to slate brands for stepping out of line (remember that Dove ad?).



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The resounding message consumers are sending out is that brands need to stay in their lane, and this will translate into the conceptualisation and delivery of content that is more mindful and respectful of social contexts. This will also have a ripple effect on the production industry itself, with creative teams becoming more diverse in order to execute ground-breaking work that speaks to a targeted audience of people. Because agencies can't be expected to hire individuals in every discipline to make up more comprehensively skilled in-house creative teams, brands will likely opt to outsource talent to remain 'creatively nimble', which leads us to our next prediction...

The agency model is changing

It's become difficult to execute a project from start-to finish in-house, especially as creative companies consider the ever-evolving cultures in South Africa, and balance that with consumers' wants and client's needs and expectations.

“ The creative industry has shifted into a new era, with client opportunities becoming more complex, and the demand to meet briefs in scope, on budget and on time is more pressing than ever. ”

As a production collective that makes it easier to outsource a myriad of talented individuals across creative fields and industries, we as Blacksmith Collective have witnessed how brands are moving to where they know their problems can be creatively and intuitively solved, without the limitations that come with traditional retainers or contracts. The focus is shifting towards project-based billing, as it provides brands with the freedom to move around and maintain the integrity of the work. In 2018, the power of collective creativity will come to the fore, with brands opting to work with people who are the best in their respective fields – whether that's AR, VR, voice, digital marketing, social media, film, photography, strategy or even engineering. Brands will also expect to have a single point of contact to put them in touch with the most talented individuals in the industry relevant to what a project or campaign aims to achieve.

The most successful brands in 2018, and in general, will be the ones that ride the disruption wave instead of digging in their heels and hoping for the best. The industry is in flux, and we're moving closer to a golden age, where consumers feel heard and respected, and creative teams consist of the best people for the job at hand.

It's an exciting time for all of us, consumers and creatives alike, and we can't wait to see how these new developments transform the industry for better.