

What? No such thing as marketing "insights"?!

 By [Matt Rose](#)

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Recently an [article by Farrah Bostic](#), objecting to the over-inflated status of the word "insight" when it comes to advertising planning, really inspired me. It brought to light some interesting perspectives about how this term has been in vogue the last few years and usually is a way to 'dress up' common sense observations or interesting statistics.

Bostic admits that a strategic planner/director can be an insightful thinker or keen observer but the idea of discovering that elusive and singular core-insight is misleading and leads to a lack of flexibility in creative agencies.

How clichéd

I agree: many of us are guilty of the objectification and misuse of the term "insight" in strategic planning circles. It got me thinking about how clichéd it is.

In the advertising world, we call things "insights" for the simple reason that we need to "productise" our thinking. After all, there is a need to sell something fairly tangible to clients so they can go home and sleep easily, knowing they have bought into a valuable "core-insight" that can sit neatly on their mantel piece.

Labeling something as a "key insight" and then dogmatically sticking to it often leads to a creative crisis because there are always multiple insights constantly shifting in any given marketing situation.

Whole industry is obsessed

The whole industry is obsessed with objectification and solidification of ideas. Actually, the objectification of everything in general (but that's another story). I'm sure that if you've ever worked in a corporate environment, you will identify with endless acronyms, predefined tools and recommended ways of working - batteries of personality and aptitude testing that make short work of individuals as they are 'squashed' into four archetypal boxes.

The Coca-Cola Company's multimillion dollar marketing plan for 2020 is to remain creatively liquid.

Jonathan Mildenhall, (VP, global strategy and creative excellence) explained in his [Cannes Lions seminar](#) that Coca-Cola's marketing strategy is to remain "liquid and linked in". This is how it aims to achieve its 2020 sales objectives and "forge ever deeper connections" with consumers.

Embodiment of philosophy

Crowd-sourcing is a good embodiment of his philosophy and, as we have seen in recent years, is a force too great to be ignored in facing creative challenges. And he admitted that the majority of Coca-Cola's marketing spend will be spent on varied and extensive content creation driven by the creativity of the consumers themselves.

"One enemy of creativity is the solidification of ideas too early in the process," said Mildenhall.

We have also seen agencies that have completely dropped traditional roles in house. Client services merge with strategists, creatives are no longer 'shielded' from the clients, and clients and consumers become actively involved in the creative processes at multiple stages.

Need to be drunken masters

I agree with Mildenhall and Bostic in that, in today's quick-changing world, we need to be drunken masters, versed in forms of open-palm of boxing. Our mental software should be set to "always in beta testing" mode.

You can't wear liquid gold, but you can surf on it.

ABOUT MATT ROSE

Matt Rose, avid trend watcher passionate about SA's people, is a senior strategic planner with Promise Brand Specialists (JHB), specializing in market research, shopper marketing, behavioral psychology. He brings a grounded, often controversial approach to uncovering consumer insights. Honours include 2010 Loeries finalist (Digital) and 2011 Cannes Lions shortlisting (Digital). Email mtwrose@gmail.com, follow him on [@mtwrose](#) Twitter, connect LinkedIn.

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