

Bottom line: It's about Africa

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Africa is the story, actually the *big story* is Africa*. This was the message from Malcolm Horne, of Broll at the fourth South African Council of Shopping Centres (SACSC) annual research conference.

Held on Wednesday, 9 April at the Hilton in Sandton, it was the biggest SACSC conference to date. This year's theme this year was "Experience" and focused on the consumer, technology and the future.

Horne told delegates: "We are all sitting in Africa, but do we realise the opportunity this presents to us." There is more and more cross-border activity taking place in Africa and more interest in Sub-Saharan Africa, he said, and the real challenge is to ensure that we have the professional services and the right information and research to sell our continent.



Africa is the youngest continent in the world in terms of its people and is expected to have the largest workforce in the world by 2035. Consumer-facing industries will grow significantly between now and 2010. (Image: NASA)

Yes, Africa has its problems, but it also has opportunities. "We cannot accept what is mediocre; we have to be better than that. We must embrace transparent change; promote South Africa as a country and Africa as a continent. If we do this, we will benefit directly. We must also not underestimate our country. South Africa and the continent as a whole must be promoted and we must stand up internationally."

Africa... the world's 'youngest' continent

Marnus Sonnekus, McKinsey and Company, took up the Africa theme. "While the rest of the world's population is aging, Africa is the youngest continent in the world and is expected to have the largest workforce in the world by 2035. Its dependency on the world is therefore declining. According to Sonnekus, consumer-facing industries will grow significantly between now and 2010 and much of this is driven by the youth.

"The African youth is optimistic, especially compared to their Western counterparts. This optimism is high in Sub-Saharan Africa," he said. The youth also save a larger part of their income than their older counterparts do. Education is very important to them, they will be better educated in the future, and 50% of the youth will have received an education. They also have high levels of entrepreneurship and are creating opportunities.

The African youth are tech savvy and 58% have an internet-enabled phone. They use it mainly for instant messaging, email, music/video and social media. He also explained that they are very image conscious. "Sixty-five percent believe the clothes they own say a lot about them. They like to try new things, especially fashion - even if it costs more."

Quality and price - a delicate balance

They choose quality first with price a close second. Only 27% shop at a store that is seen to have sacrificed quality for price. "There is a delicate trade-off between quality and price. The youth are also brand conscious, and equate popular brands with quality. They are willing to spend more on these brands as well."

Sonnekus gave the audience six recommendations to conquer Africa's youth:

- Go digital but keep in mind that digital habits differ by country
- Invest in understanding the youth. Reliable data is limited and Western research must be tailored for an African context.
- Get in now and build your brand. There is still a significant first-mover advantage in Africa. African youth are also willing to try new things and feel strongly for brands.

- Get your product right. The balance of quality, brand, style and price of products are necessary.
- Localise. There are significant differences in the African youth by region, country and even city. Within countries, there are clearly defined segments whose behaviour is very different.

Altogether there 19 speakers presented at the conference, with presentations ranging from consumer insights, experiential marketing, technology and its influence on the industry as well as what the future holds.

**(A quote from a conference Horne had attended)*

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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