

Impact players

 By [Grant McEwan](#)

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Frazier and Ali. Barcelona and Real Madrid. Yankees and Red Sox. All Blacks and Springboks. Celtic and Rangers. Sport is abundant with epic rivalries. Rivalries that started for differing reasons and out of complex environments.



Photo by [football wife](#) from [Pexels](#).

But during these strange times with no live sport to satiate our thirst for epic clashes, there is a new rivalry playing out in our industry between marketing teams and bottom-line focused executives. This rivalry, like so many others, stems from a common starting point - in this instance creating and sustaining a profitable business - although time has played its part in creating an 'us versus them' feeling to how this common objective is achieved.

Battle of supremacy

The battle for supremacy has built up over the years away from the public eye, behind boardroom doors and over strongly-worded emails – it has often been one-sided for long periods of time. With the 'generalised' view that you need to spend money to make money, marketing teams have had to fight hard to get precious budget allocated to their annual plans and strategies.

On the other side of the 'playing field' executives responsible for delivering on the 'bottom line' profitability of the business often tends towards either investing in capital expenditure to drive an increase in revenue or reducing unnecessary spend to increase profit margins on existing revenue. These seemingly polarised approaches to generating profits are what fuels this boardroom rivalry.

With the economic effects of Covid-19 taking centre stage for just about every business in South Africa, the balance of power in this rivalry seems to be shifting firmly towards the side of drastically reducing costs as a prudent approach to mitigating the inevitable loss of revenue that will, or already has, become reality for so many businesses. It would appear that the odds are stacked against marketing teams, who are almost certainly destined for a long run of defeats in the boardroom.

Agencies are perfect impact players for clients

But there is hope in the darkness for marketing teams. Sporting history books are bursting at the seams with stories of

underdog victories, usually followed by long runs of sustained success in rivalries around the world. More often than not, those stories hero an individual or a collective within a team who changed the game - whether in the dying seconds of the final match-up or on a long-term strategic level to training, team dynamics and culture. In so many of these stories, the heroes have been given the title of impact player. And in the context of this particular rivalry, agencies are perfectly positioned to be the impact player for their clients.

Looking closely at these impact players it becomes evident that they all have five common traits:

- A desire to do things differently (often misinterpreted as being unpredictable)
- A structured and deliberate approach to preparing and strategising
- The ability to self-assess and alter their approach to executing their strategy in real-time
- An acute awareness of the score at all times and what needs to be done to make sure the final result is in their favour
- Most importantly, they were the perfect fit for their environment in terms of ambitions, style of play and culture

For marketing teams, the need for impact players has never been more relevant than right now. Spend less, but make more is the order of the day. If specific spend is not directly generating revenue or increasing profits, it's likely to be cut in the pursuit of metrics like ROI, NAV and dividend yields. Impact players have the ability to see the link between marketing spend and ROI - and they insist on keeping score to measure the final result.

ABOUT GRANT MCEWAN

I am a strategic, creative and analytical problem solver with a curious mind and a passion for sport. I believe that every challenge has a solution - and I take great satisfaction from the problem-solving process, as much as in the result itself.
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