

Thoughts to challenge SA's communications industry

 By [Marcus Sorour](#)

27 Jan 2012

With social media and connectivity transforming communications, clients are asking for dedicated, proactive and tech-savvy teams who can provide content and counsel which talks beyond 'the product' and positions them as industry leaders. Lower marketing budgets and higher client expectations means agencies need to continually develop and deliver more to address the challenges faced by the communications industry in 2012.



1. The rise and rise of integrated communications

Integrated communications has long been a 'buzz' phrase in the industry, but many agencies fail to realise its potential and fall back on thinking in silos - with public relations (PR) separate from other marketing and sales functions.

Relying solely on core legacy services, and a lack of expertise or strategic intent to counsel beyond their traditional remit, means many agencies are failing to provide clients with a strong ROI. In 2012, clients will demand an integrated approach to communications from their agency.

2. A demand for sector experts

As clients look for ways to stretch their communications budgets, they will demand an agency partner with deep knowledge of their sector in order to reach a specific target audience. Sector expertise results in targeted communications, which leads to sales and measurable outcomes.

More agencies in South Africa are waking up to this and focusing on a few sectors, rather than trying to be a master of many. Those who are passionate about a particular sector, and have in-depth knowledge of the buying decision-making process, stand a better chance of winning business in 2012.

3. The emergence of the trusted advisor

Agencies need to be prepared to spend more on learning and development in 2012 to retain clients, who expect a trusted advisor and not just a doer. Communications consultants who aren't constantly learning and developing will be left behind.

The skillset of a communications consultant in 2012 is multifaceted, from the delivery of strategic communications consultancy to the creation of multichannel content and social media community management. Communications consultants will be expected to deliver digital projects and introduce clients to a wider array of influencers.

4. A renewed focus on staff retention

Agencies will need to work even harder to retain staff in 2012. They need to be creative with how they design jobs, offer employees more flexibility, and provide strong development programmes to ensure talent is not just attracted but retained over the long term.

5. Rethinking measurement

With more influencers and engagement channels than ever before, and the unpredictable nature of social media, the

SA communications industry needs to rethink measurement.

In 2012, the explosion of data supplied by automated monitoring tools will be used in conjunction with human insights to create issues-based dialogue between a brand and its target audience. But what makes a successful campaign? There should definitely be a direct link between communications and business objectives.

I believe there will be much debate during the year around implementing a standardised set of measurement, such as those proposed by [The Barcelona Principles](#).

6. Spotlight on offshoring

The depreciation of the rand, favourable labour costs, solid infrastructure and world-class skills will result in more global brands and agencies looking to SA for the following offshoring services in 2012:

- project management
- design
- development of web properties and mobile applications
- content development, and

- measurement services

7. Growth in digital services start-ups

In 2012, we will see more individuals leave agencies and corporate environments to open their own one-stop digital shops - there is a huge opportunity for entrepreneurial-minded individuals to supply services directly to corporates or partner with agencies. These services include digital counsel, application development, web development and design.

8. The expert community manager

Thanks to social media, we are now all capable of influencing people and the public agenda. Community management is a specialist task, involving strategy, process and content development. There will be an increased demand from clients for agencies to provide expert counsel and community management in 2012.

9. Profiling the authentic leader

Brands with an executive who is visible and positioned as a thought leader across multiple media channels will end up building trust with consumers. In 2012, successful communications agencies will work closer with client leadership teams to show the human side of a business through increased social media and face-to-face engagements.

10. Interest from overseas

There are still a number of global communications agencies with either no local presence or a tenuous link to a SA-owned public relations agency. During 2012 we will see an increase in global agencies looking for a firmer footing in SA, either through more meaningful affiliations or acquisitions of local agencies.

11. Local is more than just lekker

English may be the language of business across urban SA, but it's only one of our 11 official languages. Local content and the targeting of local-language influencers will result in better ROI and increase trust between a brand and its target audience.

Dependent on sector focus and client base, SA's communications agencies will need to hire a more diversified

workforce and improve their language skills during 2012.

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