

Digital marketing must be a boardroom conversation



By [Natalie Bruyns](#)

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Even among South Africa's most progressive brands, digital media and marketing have not yet taken the leading role they should in boardroom conversations.

Many brands remain fairly conservative about how much money they spend on digital channels, allocating at most 10% of their total media budget to digital, depending on which market research you believe.

The reason for this is perhaps due to the confusing jargon, the pace of technology change, and the complexity of the media purchasing models. Many conservative brands and marketers retreat to what they know and understand when faced with fragmentation (premium sites, networks, ad exchanges); different ways of buying (auctions, CPM, CPC); and different technologies and new channels.

Time to reorient around the customer

Yet those that don't embrace digital technology risk falling behind the needs of their customers. They also risk falling behind an international market where brands are rapidly ramping up digital spending, with Gartner projecting that many international players will spend up to 17% of their total marketing spend on digital.



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Today's consumers are digital, mobile, and technology-savvy. They are empowering themselves rather than allowing brands to dictate to them. At the same time, leading digital brands (Amazon, Uber, Facebook etc...) are redefining the market by creating new benchmarks for customer experience and personalisation.

Customers today, thus, expect personalised services that address their immediate context and moment of need. Unless brands can integrate digital across channels and departments - marketing, service, IT, sales, call centres, branches, websites and so on - they will not meet customers' rising expectations around the customer experience.

And getting this right - driving integration of channels and delivering a more frictionless and coherent experience at every touch point - demands that senior executives get involved. It is the CMO, CIO and CEO who can rally marketing, IT, call centre and aftersales staff together to execute a digital strategy that reorients the whole business around the needs of the customer.

Data underpins the strategy

The next wave of marketing is all about providing a true one to one customer journey for every customer. As marketers, we have long spoken about the path to one to one marketing, but it is only now that digital technology has brought us close to the Holy Grail. Today, we can segment our customer bases at such a granular level that we can address every customer with highly contextual and personalised marketing messages.

In today's customer journey, it's important to understand the interconnectivity between various platforms in the customer journey as well as the role different parts of the business play in the customer journey. By tapping into data from a range of different touch points and systems, brands, can understand how to shape their customer journeys to achieve maximum engagement, conversions, and ultimately loyalty and advocacy. We can capture so much customer data at every touch point - from the mobile phone and website to the call centre and customer loyalty programme - that we can get a rounded view of our relationship with each customer and a finer understanding of their needs and desires.

Making sense of it all

From digital channels, we can capture valuable insights about where customers have been, how they have engaged with us, what they have purchased and what they have to say about the product or service. The real skill here is making sense of the data to understand customers and shape better marketing strategies and tactics.

This level of measurability, optimisation and personalisation is so powerful that no brand can afford to ignore it. What's more, customers spend their money with companies that send relevant communications that cater to their needs and wants.

You cannot give people what they need and want if you don't understand them. This demands a unified strategy, driven from the top of the organisation, to bring together customer data and experiences from every channel, touchpoint and department in the business.

ABOUT NATALIE BRUYNS

Natalie Bruyns is the general manager at 25AM. She plays an important role in overseeing company operations, building client relationships and providing strategic direction for the business. She joined 25AM in 2007 as a Client Service Director, managing key clients such as First National Bank, WesBank, South African Tourism and Hollard during her time in this role.

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