

The brain of Brian, an interview with Brian Collins

 By [Terry Levin](#)

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Terry Levin of Bizcommunity chats to Brian Collins, CCO of award-winning design and experience company [Collins](#) – 'the brand consultancy for the Convergence Era', based in New York and San Francisco...



Brian Collins in the Design Indaba media lounge

■ **During your Design Indaba presentation you touched on some key industry trends, such as big corporates buying design companies in droves, “design becoming money” and “experience becoming more important than the brand”. Any advice for South African brands to keep on top of these changes?**

Old-school models used to require relentless pushing for brands to maintain perception of values, now because of social media value is derived by the companies and brands that are seen to be making a difference. Brands need to contribute to the communities that they're trying to serve and recognise larger cultural needs. If they don't do that they'll never catch up, brand loyalty these days is earned, not pushed.

■ **Does this only apply to big brands or can smaller companies also leverage?**

Social media culture has liberated start-up brands and smaller brands from old models. There's never been a better time to be a start-up.

■ **What other trends is the experience economy causing?**

The need for brands to create meaningful experiences for customers is ironically seeing e-commerce brands such as [Amazon](#) going into the retail space, opening up high street store space. I worked with Jeff Bezos for a year – great guy; you know he never wanted to be in the book business, he just wanted a non-perishable commodity and to be able to make the claim to be the biggest online store in the world.

■ **So it's the experience economy that is prompting brands to go back to the retail high**

street?

Yes, Google and Amazon are envious of US retail chains like [Target](#) because of their distribution. Take for example a brand called [BabyOrganix](#) that we launched in North America about four years ago. They had a whole stable of products: skincare, cleaning, diapers, dishwasher, toothpaste, toiletries, wipes, sunblock. They brought in consultants who said to cull some of the SKUs and consolidate. We advised them of the value of retail space. Shelf space is like a giant billboard for connecting with people, and it's extremely valuable.

■ What other trends are important right now?

As far as e-commerce goes, Amazon has exploded into fashion and got it right, by being able to deliver experience and service. Things like offering free delivery on designer clothing such as an Alexander McQueen dress. You get a pop-up when you order, saying delivery is complimentary. Brand value only comes from real value, hence the big trend for unboxing – these are your social media moments; the opportunity to deliver real value over perception. Perceived value is the lens through which we see real value. The best way to compete against the future is through the intense love of what we do and who we do it for.

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ABOUT TERRY LEVIN

Brand and Culture Strategy consulting | Bizcommunity.com COO at large. Email terry@offtheshelf.co.za, Twitter [@terrylevin](#), Instagram, LinkedIn.

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