

# Occupy 2012



By [Chari Thom](#)

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The past year will go down in history as a time of unexpected political regime change, social unrest and civil protest, from the bloody end to Muammar Gaddafi's 41-year rule in Libya to the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York that spread very quickly around the world.



The global economy continues its inevitable shift from West to East, during the worst global financial recession (GFC) since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Closer to home, the first genuine cracks have started appearing in the ruling party's grip on power, as South Africans grow weary of corruption and the resultant non-delivery that fuels the continued economic imbalance.

The world is in some turmoil, but such conditions make for interesting and exciting times, because they bring change. Lots of change. So here are 10 changes, or trends that I'd bet on (with varying degrees of odds) for the year ahead:

## 1. New Brand Order

Uncertain times will separate the adults from the children.

Brave marketers will invest behind their brands and seize the short-to medium-term opportunities that are unique to the prevailing economic conditions. Weak or over-cautious marketers will continue to sit on their wallets in an attempt to prop up the bottom line, but do little else than lose market share.

## 2. Media confluence

"Traditional" media will become newly relevant through use in different ways, as the confluence between traditional and digital media increases.

The television commercial must feel a bit like Mark Twain did, after he heard that his obituary had been posted in The New York Journal, and he famously said, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated".

TV ads will continue to find their way to audiences through digital platforms such as YouTube, and print ads will make their way onto an ever-increasing array of tablets in various guises.

## 3. The big idea

The big idea will continue to reign supreme and determine the location of brand custodianship. As the Brazilian creative director Marcello Serpa said at Cannes back in 2010, "The only line that matters is the line between good and bad ideas".

Agencies worth working with will be capable of blowing these ideas out across the various relevant channels. Including digital which, yes, is just another (incredibly rich and versatile) channel in the overall mix.

## 4. Mobile power

South Africa often displays what I like to call "technological leapfrog syndrome". A large portion of the market lags behind in terms of the adoption of new technology, due to the prohibitively high cost at the outset. But, as with most

technology advances, if you can't afford it at launch, you'll have access to it at a fraction of the price in a year or two.

So, while most South Africans were unable to afford personal computers to access digital and social media platforms, the availability of smartphones, and affordable Chinese-manufactured Android phones in particular, has seen lower-income South Africans embrace digital and social media in droves.

## **5. Digital proliferation**

Just as traditional media saw increasing proliferation over the last 15 years, particularly post-apartheid, so digital media will proliferate, but at an exponential rate when compared to its traditional counterparts.

SA has been plugged into global digital media platforms from birth and consumers will consistently face new choices.

## **6. Digital fatigue**

Proliferation and constantly streaming information will lead to digital fatigue.

I have a number of digital streams, which are available for me to monitor on a daily basis: Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Stocks, News24, New York Times and BeachWatch, to name a few. According to Eric Schmidt, ex-CEO of Google, we create as much information in two days now as we did from the dawn of man through to 2003.

Unless you're retired or a social recluse, you won't have enough time to monitor and absorb all the information accessible to you on a regular basis. Consumers are going to become selective about the social media platforms they access and potentially categorise them in terms of frequency of access, or suffer from severe ADD.

Understanding which consumers access which platforms, when, will be critical for brands when interacting.

## **7. Radio Nowhere**

In his hit-song Radio Nowhere, Bruce Springsteen deals with the demise of genuine, in-the-flesh, human interaction. The way human beings interact with each other on a one-to-one basis has perhaps changed more in the last 20 years than ever before in history.

This is becoming increasingly true for the younger generation, and teenagers communicate almost exclusively via digital platforms. While older generations may bemoan the loss of social skills, it's simply that social skills as they once knew them, are being replaced with a new way, and we will in fact see them become late, but enthusiastic adopters of digital communication and social media platforms.

## **8. Smaller shops**

More and more clients will seek out small-to-medium-sized agencies as they look to find hands-on attention from experienced operators on their brands.

While there is a need for agencies of all shapes and sizes, I have always believed that an agency becomes a fundamentally different business when it moves past the 60-80 person mark. In my view, it's simply not possible to maintain the same attention to quality in a bigger operation.

## **9. Real returns**

Upper-income consumers will increasingly seek out authenticity. Brands that speak to them truthfully and honestly and brands that offer a "craft" that delivers according to quality standards of a bygone era.

## 10. What's in it for me

Lower-income consumers will demand more from their brands. They want to see real benefits and real rewards; no longer is it good enough to promise and deliver a quality product.

This trend is evident in the cellular industry, where consumers will have various SIM cards from different operators to capitalise on cheaper call, SMS and data rates offered at different times of the day or week via different brands.

While trends will come and go, brands will continue to play a meaningful role in consumers lives. Good marketers and agencies will understand how they interact with brands and capitalise on this; brilliant marketers and agencies will create the new ways of interaction and determine popular culture.

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