

## 09: Digital, mobile research in Africa

 By [Ingrid von Stein](#)

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The ninth [Thought Leadership Digibate](#), recently hosted by [Aegis Media](#) in conjunction with [Bizcommunity.com](#) in Cape Town, focused on the relevance of digital and mobile research in Africa. If you missed the Digibate, download or listen to the podcast which is now available.

Research is an incredibly hot topic right now as technological advances spur new ways of thinking, inspire novel methodologies in reaching consumers, and shake the foundations of traditional methodologies.



In the ninth and final Aegis Media Thought Leadership Digibate of 2012, panelists were asked to consider the relevance of digital and mobile research in Africa, and give some thought to the trends taking root here, and whether the growth in the sector is being served by the current research on offer.

The panel included thought leaders in the mobile and research industries. Arthur Goldstuck of World Wide Worx; Mark Molenaar of TNS; Craig Page-Lee from Posterscope; iProspect's Peter Stewart; Butch Rice of Pondering Panda and Aegis Media's Dawn Rowlands fiercely debated the subject, and came up with some fascinating insights into the sector.

### Key takeout advice

The industry is changing fast and brands need to strengthen their internal marketing departments so that they truly understand the value of research and how vital it is to drill down into their markets to discover the truth of that market's wants and needs.

Those insights are crucial to working in tandem with your business and marketing plans. So if you are unable to do the research and interpret the data properly, it is essential to hire a proficient research specialist to assist you in doing the research you need to grow your brand in the market place.

The value of research becomes evident once the brand leaders take key insights to build their strategies. Thus, research becomes an integral part of business and brand growth, and a partnership with research specialists can result in true innovation and business leadership.

### The time of true data analysts is now

The way in which data is being interpreted gets better and more efficient day by day, but it takes skilled data analysts to interpret what is being harvested via various methodologies. Not all current systems capture the correct data and if they are, is that data being interpreted correctly?

One of the challenges, for example, is that a lot of research is being done on the African market, but not necessarily by Africans, which does not give a true African picture. We need to understand and accept that the African market is different from the rest of the world and how we do research needs to be done from an African perspective and interpretation.

What data should you believe, when there is so much information flowing into the marketplace? This means much more effort needs to be put into defining the target audience, and its sample frame. And then letting the analysts analyse! It also means that brand headers and strategists should integrate and question validity before using any research available.

But the whole process starts with understanding who the consumer is, what they want and how they make decisions online.

## **Using data to draw a holistic picture of the consumer**

Gaining insights into your consumers is vital, but getting the consumer to engage and transact with your brand is still the key issue and this is where the interpreting of data comes in. The panelists all agreed the real industry differentiator is understanding and interpreting the data.

But it's not just a numbers game. The trend and current market practice is to focus on quality and not quantity. Both researchers and brands want to truly understand their consumer behaviour. Fortunately, in South Africa we have industry research players who add great value in terms of insights and understanding through experience gained over the years.

But what exactly do you want to know? Before embarking on market research, it is vital to establish what you want to find out and then apply logic as to what questions will help you mine that information to help you gain the consumer insights you are looking for. It's all about context.

Brands need to get their hands dirty and think the campaign through from concept to conversion to ensure that they have covered all their bases. Only then can you send a fully operational and expert sales team on the mission to convert the data into a purchase.

## **Research methodologies: are they current enough?**

There are so many more ways now to gather information on consumers than there were a few years ago. Long-term research has always been around, but quick online snap surveys have become increasingly popular in our fast-moving world. Panelists are convinced we will start seeing a lot more brand DIY surveys popping up and mining information.

Research being done via mobile phones in the under-34 sector is staggering. You can ask a question on mobile and within minutes have over a thousand responses. Mobile research is quick, easy, direct and specifically to the point. Responses are almost immediate. This is a huge market advantage and can assist brands in making key marketing decisions.

It is also cost effective and brands can have immediate/live access to watch the feedback coming in. It's a game-changer in the field and certainly at the forefront of research in Africa today. Considering the mobile penetration in Africa, and that's not so surprising.

Mobile research allows a brand to truly have its finger on the pulse of their consumers. However, an industry challenge for researchers is for them to create a better understanding of their value proposition and market strength. Education is key, so continually sharing skills and research methodologies with the market helps underpin their importance in the industry.

## **Power of short, sharp mobile surveys - does it deliver?**

They're fast, they're fun and they deliver quick results but do snap surveys really give you the information you need on your consumers? The panelists agreed once more that the quality of the questions asked would drive the quality of the information received.

Mobile is certainly a way of the future, but not the only way, as face-to-face engagement with the consumer will always be the most in-depth and accurate way of understanding the market. While there is massive growth potential in the mobile arena, it is clear that the correct research needs to be done as to what can be achieved in the marketplace. And it is vital that traditional methods as well as mobile research are combined to gain a clearer picture of the consumer and their needs.

## **Now what about the out of home environment...**

Posterscope South Africa conducts twice-yearly audits in 16 African countries, in which every billboard and street pole is

audited. Based on this research/audit every brand that is active in the OOH arena is investigated and information regarding consumers can be drilled down to an almost definite consumer profile and behaviour pattern.

## **What is the value of consumer insight?**

People are constantly searching for information so being able to understand what they are looking for, when they are looking for it, and what they want to achieve when they find it, remains key to any brand's marketing strategy.

The problem is, much of the time, the lack of integrated campaigns. Many brands still run above-the-line campaigns that have no tie-in with their mobile or digital campaigns. Until we bridge this gap and have fully integrated *through-the-line* campaigns, a lot of valuable consumer insights and interactions will be lost.

And that is why doing proper and in-depth market research is vital to brand survival in the marketplace. Africa continues to see consumers researching online but buying offline so if your brand information is not cohesive and carried through on all aspects of your marketing campaigns, you will miss out on business opportunities.

## **Mining the data and giving clients value for money**

Research companies often work on a project basis, so how do you mine the data and insights needed by your clients and give them value for their money?

The stronger the relationship between the research company and client, the better the use of data will be as a trusted research partner is able to assist you in truly understanding the research and extracting the key insights you require to specific questions. The longer the relationship, the more client history and research you have to pull from to gain better consumer insights.

But it's also essential to package that data into easily digestible and useable bits so as to help the client understand how their research can translate into achieving their business goals.

From agency side, the better the understanding of the client's business, the easier it is for an agency to assist them to understand and gain insights into the research we conduct for them. The best clients are the brands who want us to really drill down into the consumer insights, giving them the most in-depth consumer knowledge possible.

## **Finally, let's talk about the pink elephant in the room - Google!**

Historically, the information on consumers online was restrictive, but Google has changed this dramatically. Google Analytics, with all its latest developments, is a tool that is now available to brands wanting to do online research into markets. Their vision and goal is to build a 'life-time' view of each consumer interacting via the variety of devices they may own into a single profile per consumer.

Yes, many in the market are skeptical and believe 'big brother' is watching them, but the information available to brands will be prolific. This is the most exciting time for researchers and brands globally and how we use these tools and information will be up to us to structure to suit our business goals.

At the end of the day the better understanding we have of consumer patterns and behaviour, the better we are able to talk and engage with them on their own terms to convert from conversation to transaction.

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