

Four trends to shape the marketing and communications landscape in 2014

 By [Diane Charton](#)

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The consumer landscape is changing rapidly, and marketing and communications professionals must adapt quickly to the new trends if they are to help their brands thrive in this always-evolving environment. Here are four trends I'm expecting to shape the marketing and communications world over the next year or so.

Unleashing the potential of mobile

With Effective Measure stats (June 2013) showing that 36% of South Africa's digital users rely on mobile connectivity, the mobile phone is becoming one of the most important channels for marketing and communications professionals to master.

Consumers are shopping, banking, accessing news, sending and receiving email, using social media, and more, all through their handsets. The smartphone is the first thing the digital consumer looks at when he or she wakes up in the morning; he or she takes it everywhere and looks at it several times an hour.

Yet brands are struggling to make mobile marketing work for them, losing out on the full potential of this engaging and powerful channel.

In one DMMA study, only 3% of respondents said they found adverts in mobile applications useful and the figure was even lower for mobile websites. Next year, brands will focus on making advertising and communication on the mobile device more relevant and engaging for the consumer, with a heavy focus on targeting, location-based services and personalisation of content.

From brand stories to people stories

The ways that brands tell their stories needs to change. No longer do their customers want to hear brand stories or product stories - they want to hear people stories. They want the human story behind the company and its brand - and they want it told in an impactful manner that speaks to them.

Visual storytelling is becoming ever more important. As marketers, we've always understood the value of a picture, but today, it's faster and easier to share images and videos through social media. Using images cleverly will be an important aspect of any winning content strategy.

Weaving stories across channels and media is also important - that's why the integrated category is becoming so important

at the Cannes advertising awards. Marketers must be able to create effective connections that resonate with consumers across multiple media and devices.

Behind this multimedia, multichannel storytelling, each campaign needs to be driven as much by business strategy as it is by creative. Tomorrow's advertising and marketing executive understands that he or she is providing a business solution, meant to drive customer acquisition, retention and satisfaction.

Understanding human behaviour

To be successful in marketing and advertising, we need to understand human motivation and behaviour at a deep level so that we are more able to influence it. Marketers are developing new frameworks and models to improve our understanding of our customers - this is evident in the growing popularity of behavioural economics.

Behavioural economics challenges us to understand the irrational and often unconscious factors - stereotypes, common sense, rules of thumb and other cognitive filters and short cuts - that influence how consumers make decisions.

Once we understand the consistent and predictable ways that people make irrational decisions, we can use the insight to better predict (and thus influence) human behaviour. There is much to learn from behavioural economics about how we should design, sell, price and market products.

Lifelong learning

We live in a world where qualifications won't guarantee you a job and where you need to keep building your skills to stay ahead of an evolving business landscape. This is the case in marketing and communications even more than it is in other business disciplines because of the fast pace of our sector.

Luckily, education, training and information are more accessible than ever before, making it possible for marketing professionals to keep growing their skills and knowledge. Online courses, workshops, seminars, blogs, YouTube's content repository, knowledge communities (e.g. forums and social media groups) and more, empower us with incredible access to information.

Best of all, marketing professionals can now easily learn through a myriad of digital platforms as they work and apply their new knowledge and skills in a practical workplace setting. Simply put, there is no excuse not to learn something new every day.

Those that invest in up-skilling and learning while they work will give themselves a competitive edge in the marketing space. They will find themselves in great demand among agencies and brands who need marketing and communications professionals to drive their business's growth and profitability.

ABOUT DIANE CHARTON

As managing director of Red & Yellow, Diane Charton steers the strategic direction of the business. She strives to empower and educate the SA marketing communications industry through a myriad of traditional and digital educational platforms. With a unique combination of marketing, leadership and engineering experience, Charton brings a multifaceted approach to using marketing trends and insights to innovate and empower the industry as a whole. Follow @DCharton on Twitter.
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