

Continental Outdoor Media continues to break ground



By [Adelaide McKelvey](#)

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Africa is made up of a multitude of cultures and countries, all of whom have their own laws, governments and business ethics. When developing outdoor advertising sites in sub-Saharan Africa, a clear understanding of each country's municipal and city by-laws is required.

The by-laws that apply within South Africa are quite different to those in other countries; most sub-Saharan countries have lenient, if any, by-laws and legislation governing outdoor advertising. This encourages illegal operators to erect structures that create clutter and decrease the value of high impact sites that we develop legally.

Africa is unique and doing business in Africa poses challenges that cannot be conceptualised by those from other continents. Without a clear understanding of the nuances, and strong research and insight, there is the risk of resorting to the "This is Africa" philosophy. Business ethics in Africa differ dramatically from one country to the next, and this provides another set of challenges.

Here are some pragmatic pointers for doing business in Africa:

- Doing business in Africa is unique and it can often be a long and costly process. It is best to be armed with patience and a robust sense of humour. Things function on Africa time and persevering to get hold of people and understanding that there is a delayed turn-over time will assist.
- There are local religious holidays and business norms that may be specific only to that country or even to that region of a country and must be respected. The locals also may not be able to speak English, so it is advisable to have a local translator.
- Bandwidth may be poor or non-existent in some regions. Africa is developing and generally outside of the industrial centres bandwidth is extremely limited, as is access to technology. It is inadvisable to offer solutions that require constant connectivity or high-speed internet. Many African businesspeople use Google or Yahoo e-mail addresses and this does not mean that there is some sort of scam but merely that the server is reliable.
- Networking in Africa is essential in getting to the right people, and fostering these relationships can ensure the success or lead to the failure of business transactions.
- Media measurement surveys in Africa are limited, so whatever research is available should be used, and supplemented with the research that your company is able to do.

Advertising in Africa

Advertising in Africa is in a high-growth phase and strategies that work elsewhere do not necessarily have the same impact or retention as in mature markets.

Television is generally of poor quality and adverts often lose their impact because they are difficult to see or hear. High production costs are also a barrier to quality.

The lack of dependable electricity supplies also makes television an unreliable option. Radio has very good reach, but is fragmented. Most African countries have over 100 radio stations due to the multitude of different dialects. Print, though widely consumed, is reliant on literacy and distribution. Outdoor advertising is growing in both urban and rural areas and provides reliable and consistent brand building opportunities.

Barry Sayer, executive chairman of Continental Outdoor Media, commented, "Billboards have the advantage in areas where literacy levels are low of having a visual representation of the product advertised. The consumer may hear about a brand on the radio, but then not be able to recognise the product once they arrive at the retail outlet."

Breaking ground

Great creative advertising will have immense impact. An integrated media mix using outdoor advertising as the foundation will build your brand consistently and quickly. Using radio and billboards in conjunction and driving consumers from outdoor billboards to mobile platforms will provide the best results.

The world is made up of different economic zones - emerged vs. emerging - with Africa being mostly emerging. The emerged countries generally have more modern and formal infrastructures and public transport systems. Out-of home (OOH) development has always followed the development of urban areas and follows the consumer - the more consumers the more OOH.

In Africa, development is about building local capacity and ownership, good governance, and inclusive development. Companies need to demonstrate a commitment to the market through communication and operationally. Engage local talent, support local communities, and gain consumers' trust.

Developing digital platforms

Africa is developing its digital platforms. What we are seeing is that Digital Out-of-home (DOOH) definitely has a place in Africa, but only in environments that have sophisticated infrastructures (e.g. airports, malls, and some roadside). Most outdoor advertising formats that we have developed in South Africa have been developed within the 13 countries that we operate. This provides us with a consistent base and gives marketers the opportunity to promote global brands across all markets.

South Africa has historically been more technologically advanced and developed than the rest of Africa. This is no longer the case. Africa is uniquely poised to take advantage of new technologies and springboard learning's from around the world and fast track business applications and procedures.

President Obama believes that sub-Saharan Africa can be the world's next major economic success story. In June 2012, he issued the '[U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa](#)', committing the United States to elevate their efforts to spur economic growth, trade, and investment in sub-Saharan Africa. The Chinese are investing heavily in Africa and this is promoting infrastructural growth, which in turn creates a demand for outdoor signage. According to Chris Maroleng in Africa Futures 2012 presentation for eNCA, the projected average growth of the continent will be 4.8% in 2013, it was 4.5% in 2012 and the actual growth in 2011 was 3.4%.

African consumerism is on the rise and bodes well for the promotion of goods and services on outdoor advertising. Continental Outdoor Media have many years' experience in Africa which translates into sound marketing, sales and operational service throughout all the markets in which we operate.

The geography and spread of countries' populations within Africa ensure that OOH is consumed in both rural and urban environments, however the strategies applied to both often differ. OOH formats in Africa still cater for the masses and there is still a strong reliance on reaching consumers using the traditional billboard.

Outdoor Advertising, due to its visual strength, is consumed in a similar way throughout the world. OOH is omnipresent and ubiquitous, it cannot be turned off.

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