

# Humanness: The elephant in the service industry

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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We are not as happy as we were last year. This is the finding of the Ask Afrika Orange Index 2013/14 released recently in Johannesburg.

Sarina de Beer, MD of Ask Afrika said: "We are one of the most unhappy countries in the world and we need more heroes and these need to be the daily type, not the ones that come along once in a while."

Ferial Haffajee, editor of City Press, one of the sponsors of the Index, commented: "The Index found South Africans are very happy to live here and have invested heavily in this country, but we are not as happy as we should be. Youth, however, are the country's ticking time bomb. Their world is very far from our reality. As a developmental state we are in trouble. After 18 to 19 years of democracy why is life still so hard for black South Africans? We are a story of decline."

She said South Africans speak up and that is a big positive in safeguarding our democracy. "We march, protest, and go to court and we should not be ashamed of it. Our country is finely balanced between what it is and what it can be. South Africans want brands to do good for this country."

## Why it's better to be happy

Why is happiness important? Because happiness has a significant impact on service levels - the more unhappy a country the less the service level and the Index found that while there have been service improvements since last year, service is no longer just required in service industries, but across all industries.

"Humanness is the big elephant in the service industry. A lack of humanness will raise a consumer's dissatisfaction by 45% - which is much more than a poor transactional service experience will. The traditional elements such as transactional don't count anymore; high levels of these types of services are a given in the world today. Consumers have changed the dialogue and what they expect quite dramatically," she said.

Andrea Rademeyer, CEO of Ask Afrika, who presented the findings of the Index, explained that despite dissatisfaction levels having decreased and being better at the transactional stuff, the sad news is that it does not matter as much.

"On the upside many stores have had facelifts and consumers are appreciating this. However, while consumers are seeing that things are better, it is still not enough and they are not convinced that brands are making them feel special enough. Brands are going to have to find ways to deal with the more abstract parts of service that consumers are pushing for."

## Trust is key

Consumers are after happiness and a brand can share this. Technology has given consumers a strong focus around their connectiveness to a brand. There is a need for consumers to be a part of something, said Rademeyer. "Key here is trust is important here and as brands we need get inside the circle of trust of the consumer."

Technology has also led to the philosophy of a shared economy. "Everything consumers experience is transferred onto their phones and shared. This means that one consumer's experience of my brand becomes other consumers brand experience and part of their collective memory." Rademeyer said this places brands in a risky position depending on that experience.

"We must understand that trends that shape future behaviour are important and not historic trends. However, many companies still spend money on measuring what are outdated trends and does not increase the bottom line."

## ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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