

Marketing to and learning from Gen Y

Marketers who have been battling to know what goes on in the minds of South African youth were invited to HDI youth marketing's Summer School for marketers last week. One of the things highlighted was that for young adults, happiness is fifth down the list of what they want - at the top of their annual birthday list is a clothing voucher.

By [Tshepiso Seopa](#) 25 Sep 2008

South Africa's first multicultural generation - Generation Y - has far more opportunities than the previous generation, have been freed of dependence on conventional media, and is more interested in making their mark and expressing themselves, says Tracy Robison, strategic director for Yellowwood Brand Architects

Robinson was speaking at the HDI Summer School Camp that was held 17 - 18 September 2008 at the University of Johannesburg Auckland Park new Bunting Road Campus. The aim of the conference was to help and equip marketers with insight as well as facts about the media young adults consume and brands that speak to them.

Culture of expression

Almost all speakers who presented at the two day conference agreed that Generation Y is more interested in making their mark and expressing themselves than being in "paternalistic conversations" that push information to them.

They want to belong to a niche as well as stand out as individuals within a group. This generation wants to express itself. So, instead of trying to force communication on them, ask yourself this question: *'how do I help to facilitate a conversation and how can we participate?'* says Robinson.

"Because urban youth have online friendships, have control of the mediums they consume, user generate content and the impact of co-creation in shaping the way young people interact with brands."

Gareth Cliff echoed Robinson's sentiments in his presentation. He emphasised authenticity in adverts because young people are in charge of their mediums, don't subscribe to mediums, and they can move at any time.

According to Cliff, young adults do not want to be patronized. They just want honest advertising.

"They share brand experiences with friends, so bad experiences with brands will have a negative experience on the brand story," says Cliff.

Changing the teaching environment

Speaking on uncovering real expertise of young people, Gordon Cook, national navigator, Vega Brand Communications School said: "Even though things have changed, the teaching environment has hardly changed, the philosophical assumption has not changed. The fact that knowledge comes from a subject is absurd. Real thinking happens when subjects come into conflict with other subjects."

Most companies are not young and learner friendly, says Cook, referring to the sensory experience 'brick' that often prevents young graduates from entering the workplace.

“Companies can learn from young people, how to learn from young people. Youth marketing companies tend to approach young employees with the attitude: ‘we want your money but we don't want you around’.”

Different histories and diversities generate creativity in the workplace. The more diversity you have inside, the more creativity you get out. The workplace needs to understand that, young people don't want to sit and can't sit. The headspace of young people is indeed the company's greatest asset, Cook emphasised.

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