

Getting a return on sponsorship investments

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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Marketing in South Africa is rapidly moving toward direct contact with target markets and at the same time sponsors are realising the need to not only get a good return on investment but also to develop communities which in turn creates powerful brand loyalty.

Because in this day and age, trust, honesty and integrity are not enough - brands need to entrench loyalty if they want to stay relevant and profitable.

In the competitive and cluttered world that we live in, it raises the question of whether straight advertising - be it print, online, digital or outdoor is enough? Is advertising on its own even relevant in a society that is facing numerous challenges as democracy grows?

And finally, how do brand strategists justify ad spend when they could be using that money to invest in the future of South Africa? These questions reflect some of the challenges that industry leaders face in South Africa, where it is sometimes difficult to focus on the basic idea that "business is business".

Innovative brand leaders are braving the way and choosing to engage with communities in ways that inform, involve, impact and inspire - and are discovering that this in turn delivers great return on investment for their brands - now and in the future - as these communities recognise the contribution that these companies are making to their lives and to their futures.

One such example of community engagement is the Stars in Education awards 2011, a groundbreaking initiative from Argo, a multi-media solutions provider, focused on making a difference in South Africa. The Stars in Education Awards has been running for four years and focuses on recognising the role of teachers in our communities and inspires belief in our teachers and in the power of education to create a better future for all. By aligning with this campaign, sponsors have shown their commitment to a better future and have built brand credibility, as the campaign is grounded in real life stories of hope and inspiration.

Another facet to Stars in Education is that it creates valuable content as the finalists from the competition are profiled to inspire other teachers to become stars and the call to entry reminds communities that teachers are the most important resource we have. Spokesperson for Stars in Education, Lauren Bright has this to say, "The Stars in Education campaign is a unique teachers recognition campaign that focuses on those that go the extra mile in their communities, by being inspirational role models to all around them and changing lives through their actions. This campaign offers sponsors an opportunity to show their support for the key influencers of our future generation, by recognizing the crucial role teachers play in shaping not only learning conditions, but attitudes of the heart and dreams for the future".

Both corporate and media sponsors seem to agree as the Stars in Education Awards 2012 has already elicited new sponsor partnership from Mindset Learn, Macmillan and the Transnet Foundation. MetroFM have been involved from the inception of the campaign. This powerful collaboration of partners enhances the campaign and aids it in taking it to a new level of impact and recognition.

Mr Roith Rajpal, Mindset Network CEO, has this to say about their involvement with the initiative, "Mindset Learn has always been a consistent supporter of teachers in South Africa. We produce relevant curriculum aligned content in multi-media format in order to assist teachers to explain difficult concepts in their classrooms. We are excited to be the broadcast partner of Stars in Education, the project that recognises the important role that teachers play in developing communities. Through this partnership, we shall create awareness of teachers' hard work and dedication in educating the nation."

When asked what motivated the Transnet Foundation to commit their support to the Stars in Education Awards 2012, Senior Manager of Education, Theresa Vivian Moila responded passionately, "At Transnet Foundation we believe that teachers are at the forefront of a good quality education system. Teacher quality is critical for improving learner performance. Well trained teachers are able to deliver the curriculum and improve learner performance. I believe in the value of our teachers, the ability to shape young minds. It is against this background that we are embarking on a teacher development programme that seeks to give teachers requisite skills to impart knowledge to learners and enhance their performance. The focus for Transnet is to improve an individual educator so that she has the better capacity to impart knowledge and improve learner performance."

Caren Maree, Group Marketing and Teacher Campus Manager for Macmillan, is also proud to be on board, "At Macmillan we believe we are selling more than textbooks, we are selling an education! It is therefore a high priority for us to be part of an award that recognises those teachers that makes it their life's work to give their learners an education that prepares them for the demands of the 21st century."

Based on the success of the Stars in Education campaign, Argo are now launching the Future Stars campaign, to inspire youth to dream of a better future through education. After all, if the learners are not inspired to learn, then there's no point to having motivated teachers to teach. And what better way to position a brand's future potential than to connect with the youth as they dream of the future - that's when they make their buying decisions, which become reality as that first pay cheque arrives. Argo's Research Executive, Sue Fontannaz, sums it up, "Business is about creating value for the customer, and what better way to create this value than by creating a better future for all of us."

For further information on the Stars in Education or Future Stars projects, contact Argo Sponsorship Manager, **Lauren Bright**, on 083 577 6622 or mail lauren@argo.org.za. For further information go to www.ed.org.za.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

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