

## Is marketing moving with the times?

A few years ago I calculated that, every year in South Africa, roughly R50 billion was wasted or ill-conceived or just plain bad marketing.

 By Chris Mberdyk: @chrismoerdyk <sup>5 Apr 2012</sup>

This revelation came on the heels of research produced by Millward Brown, that showed 20% of all advertising not only didn't work but actually impacted negatively on the brands it was supposed to be promoting.

So, have things improved? Is marketing still efficient or continuing to shed money as though there was no tomorrow?

### Deregulation

Since 1994, there has not only been considerable deregulation but this country has become well and truly integrated into the international community in every sense of the word - business, sport, culture and crime.

The past couple of decades have seen a major change in the psyche of the South African consumer from being too timid or terrified to complain to toy-toying at the drop of a hat. Global competition has come home to roost.

But still our marketers are sticking to old-fashioned stereotype strategies.

Strategies that pay lip-service to the concept of customer care - our service levels are still pitifully low. Surprisingly enough, it seems to be the previously disadvantaged, who were largely excluded from front-line marketing in the past, who seem to have a firmer grasp and understanding of the importance of customers than those with decades of experience in the marketing field.

### Customer service sucks

Customer service, quality and employee development in the marketing field still seem inexorably stuck on wall plaques and in mission statements, rather than put into practice.

But where marketing really seems adrift in the doldrums is in the field of communications.

From a PR point of view, marketers still hang on to naïve and horrendously defensive strategies to protect their products, brands and companies. They're like parents who just can't accept that little Johnny isn't a gullible five-year-old anymore but a young, mature adult.

And, on the advertising front, it is even worse. It is as though those creative teams responsible for our advertising are either stuck in the 1980's or floundering about in desperation. Quite apart from which, I am convinced that not many of our creatives make a point of consuming media to the same degree as their target markets.

Because far too many advertisements suggest that they are completely out of touch with the media which

they are employing as a communications tool.

## **Consumptive media**

The main problem seems to be coming to terms with the dramatic changes in media consumption over the past two decades.

Twenty years ago, when South Africa was isolated from international sport, art, culture and to a large degree business as well, we not only had a lot of time to devote to media, particularly newspapers, television and magazines, but we simply had to keep in touch with what was going on around us, if only to look for clues in the news as to whether we were to live or die in a bloody revolution.

Now things are completely different. We don't need to read or watch the news to know if we are going to live or die - that's a given and depends entirely on our lack of luck with regard to hijackers, Aids and road traffic

While all of this explains drops in newspaper readership, for example, it also suggests that we have all sorts of other things that demand our attention. The internet and international sport, to name but two.

## **Shocking shock tactics**

All of which means that we have less time and inclination to watch, read and listen to advertisements. And marketers have reacted to this by trying to "shock" consumers into noticing ads. Or entice them with what look like Hollywood productions. Which, in my opinion is a suicidal strategy because consumers, frankly, have far better things to do than work out the subtleties of an ad.

Perhaps it's time to go back to basics in marketing communications. After all, isn't this that the consumer is crying out for?

"Cut the platitudes, shock tactics, subtleties and guesswork; just tell us what you're flogging and one good reason why we should buy it," is what I hear the market saying.

So, has marketing really changed in SA? The short answer is no. Because everything you have read above is pretty much word for word what I wrote 12 years ago. Nothing has really changed.

## **ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK: @CHRISMOERDYK**

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on [moerdykc@gmail.com](mailto:moerdykc@gmail.com) and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).  
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