

## Marketers lagging behind in transformation game

South Africa's marketers owe the ad industry a huge debt of gratitude for not only including them but also giving them pole position naming rights, in the ground-breaking Marketing, Advertising and Communications BEE Charter. Frankly, the marketing industry's involvement in the drafting the charter has been minimal.

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#) 24 Nov 2005

Of course, some might argue that the collapse of the MFSA has resulted in the ad industry having to "front" this charter. But, ever since the process started way back in 2001, even before the MFSA was launched, marketers, then represented by the conservative old farts of Asom, were never really interested in transformation and when they eventually did come to the table, it was with reluctance and lack of interest. So it was left to the ad industry, represented by the ACA, that had to take ownership of the process, which was a bit like engine manufacturers representing the interests of the motor industry.

While the ACA - along with the AMF, ASA, Cafe, Design SA, Media Seta, Prisa, Saarf and the research industry - need to be applauded for years of hard work after being soundly slapped about by parliament, marketers now need to play catch up because they are not only lagging far behind but are like petulant children having to be dragged to school by the ears.

### A victory for advertising

This charter is a victory for the advertising and communications industries. It is also a victory for government. Because it would not have seen the light of day had it not been for the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS).

It would be churlish for anyone in the broader marketing industry to downplay or ignore the role government has played in the process. Initially, while the Portfolio Committee on Communication might well have slapped the industry about in no uncertain terms, it has never prescribed action, instructed or threatened legislation. Instead it has simply created a foundation upon which the industry has been able to explain itself to the public of South Africa.

Equally, when the GCIS was requested by parliament to assist with the process it played an enormous role in leading and facilitating plenary sessions and providing a secretariat.

It was the same with the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), the partnership between government and the country's top commercial media owners.

Once again, the GCIS played an enormous role. As a board member of the MDDA I am fully aware that this organisation would never have got to first base had it not been for the massive amount of remarkable non-partisan input from the GCIS.

I suppose it's a throwback to the past, that anyone actually suggesting that Government could do anything good, should be considered a turncoat and puppet of the regime.

### Government must take credit

But, I must say that credit is certainly due in this case to government for having done an outstanding job. And if this praise of government earns me another round of catcalls and criticism regarding my independence

and integrity from that boring little band of faceless grandstanding cynics who respond to online articles such as this from behind a cowardly curtain of anonymity, I frankly, as always, could not give a toss. It's about time someone in the media admitted that government does occasionally do something right.

The process has come a long way in these past four years. I remember clearly where it all started. It was in April 2001 when the producers of SABC's Yizo-Yizo youth programme publicly complained that racism was the reason why the then lily-white advertising industry was not supporting with commercials what was clearly one of the most watched and most popular programmes on TV at the time.

SABC invited me and John Farquhar to come and hear their side of the story and when John and I published our various articles on racism in the ad industry it unleashed howls of dismay and dissent.

From my own point of view, it was a pretty harrowing experience because I came under severe attack from the bulk of whites in the ad industry as well as from a lot of my colleagues in the media business.

The resultant furore in the media caused Nkenke Kekana, the then chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communication, to convene hearings into racism in the ad industry.

My submission to parliament that demonstrated that racism was indeed prevalent in the marketing and ad industries, caused another furore and I found myself in the rather strange situation of being a fairly elderly white guy supported wholeheartedly by black people in the advertising and media industries but virtually ostracised by the whites. The rest however, is history...

But, the transformation process is most certainly not history. The ad industry has made enormous strides. In spite, I might add, of the marketing industry having no qualms whatsoever of luring away black talent trained by the ad industry at every available opportunity.

## **Marketing in the dark ages**

Of course the companies marketers work for almost all have wonderful BEE policies, but the marketing process is still lagging behind in the dark ages. Not only are they still indulging in token appointments at management level but far too many are still insisting on racial stereotyping and segregationist marketing campaigning.

Typical of this unwillingness to accept the new South Africa is the fact that marketers continue to force SAARF to provide segmentation data based on Whites, Coloureds and Indians in one group and blacks in a completely separate group. This, despite the fact that SAARF actually tried to abandon this clearly racist process as far back as 1997 and then took the decision in 2003 to abandon it, which they did, only to be forced by the marketers who paid their salaries to carry on providing this information.

Of course there are those who argue vociferously that the old WCI/Blacks thing is not racist but essential marketing in a country such as South Africa.

Which is absolute nonsense. None of those arguments hold any water today and quite frankly it has got nothing to do with marketing in SA but everything to do with some people who are just plain terrified to let go of that WCI/Blacks crutch and walk upright on their own two feet.

Hopefully the marketing representative body that is already slowly rising out of the ashes of the MFSA will

immediately become signatories to the new charter and then get on with transformation and not become obsessed like its predecessors with trying to get rich out of awards ceremonies.

And hopefully one day this charter will simply come to be called The Marketing Industry Charter because advertising, communications, PR and all the rest are all part of marketing no matter how hard subsidiary representative bodies think otherwise.

All credit though, to the ad industry for rising to the challenge. Hopefully they will, by example, be able to lead those who pay their salaries, along the same path.

## ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

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 [moerdyk@gmail.com](mailto:moerdyk@gmail.com) and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).  
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