Huge business and investment momentum in Africa

By Graham Deneys

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The positive narrative around potential customers and business in Africa (partly fuelled by the adoption of mobile on mass), has resulted in huge business and investment momentum over the last few years. The amount of work we are producing as an agency in the SSA region, on behalf of clients, versus five years ago is mind-blowing and it continues to rise.

Graham Deneys is Group Strategy Director at Carat SA/SSA.

This positive momentum has however had an additional narrative added of late as reality has taken hold around structural challenges on the continent. These challenges have forced very successful global companies to be agile beyond their current entrenched capabilities and thus stall at the very point they should be moving forward.

It has become very clear in boardrooms around the world that the “African Opportunity” is a constantly moving target – an unpredictable beast that requires a hyper-agile and a fully flexed approach that not everyone is designed for.

Africa has carved a unique path by steam-rolling traditional structural challenges and issues (no road access? Let’s fly it in by drone.) This approach is partly enabled by the stratospheric rise of mobile device adoption, enabling conversation and commerce like never before.

Mobile adoption has facilitated a sharing of knowledge that previously might have come unstuck due infrastructure issues or any number of machinations on the continent. Africa now twists left and hurtles right past most traditional obstacles on its way to global superstardom.

Those brands who are agile and able to hold on as she swings from left to right are being rewarded. Those who aren't willing to adjust are left holding the end of the tail hoping for the best, eventually falling off and licking wounds they never expected to have in the first place.

I would liken this scenario to an authenticity test.

You can jump into to Africa with the same methods you utilise in your daily business deliberations and you could perhaps be semi successful to a point (It all depends on your KPI's) However, when the beast prepares and then leaps forward in her unpredictable way, you will be left wondering what happened, unless you are entrenched and part of her DNA every step of the way thus making your business a beneficiary as opposed to a victim of growth.

Therefore, outside of the daily oil and finance chatter we see splattered across news channels, certain elements are pivotal in reinventing the African Narrative and should continue to do so going forward.

Technology, as mentioned above, has been a great enabler. At last point of reference Africa had 442 active tech hubs and enough smartphones to fill Moshood Abiola National Stadium many times over. This has fuelled a culture of busting-down-the-doors and pushing boundaries regardless of age or gender. Mobile adoption has shattered traditional communication barriers enabling great minds on the continent to collaborate like never-before. A number of brands have been at the forefront of developing services in this space and remain strong and relevant on the continent.

At the same time international trends are influencing Africa through the proliferation of connected devices and Africa, whilst adopting these influences, is simultaneously holding on to its rich heritage and culture - exporting it for the world to see. The result is a perfect symbiosis that is paying dividend with a huge increase in African talent on the world stage and renewed global interest in African creativity. This space is a huge opportunity for brands to entrench their products and services within a celebrated movement. Africa's music scene has exploded on the world stage. One only needs to do a simple search of African Musician's to discover Wizz-Kid, Phyno, Fuse ODG and Olamide, massive on the global stage with strong roots to the continent. Top honours right now should go to the charismatic Burna Boy, who just won Best Global Act at this years' *BET Awards*. I first listened to his music in 2013 when he released *Yawa Dey* (have a quick listen on YouTube) and had the honour of working with Guinness in celebrating his rising success at the time through the powerful *Guinness Made of Black* Campaign.

The art world too has turned a substantial amount of its focus onto Africa. A quick flip through *Art Africa* magazine @artafrica_mag or the addictive labyrinth that is Instagram will uncover some of the most incredible work on the globe right now.

And finally, to drive the point home, Nollywood, Nigeria's multimillion-dollar movie industry, is apparently now bigger than Hollywood in terms of revenue. Nollywood is even in the process of releasing its first ever full-length animation film: *Malika, Warrior Queen.*

How many global brands are invested in Nollywood? Your guess is as good as mine.

Whilst I certainly don't have the answers, it is clear that If you are committed, designed for agility and ready to embrace the thumping heartbeat of Africa - you should be well on your way to success.

Just be patient, the traffic is an absolute nightmare.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graham Deneys is Group Strategy Director at Carat SA/SSA.