

# Hacking away at marketing's reputation

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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Never before have corporate marketing budgets, measurement and spending been under such scrutiny from boards of directors, CEOs and particularly financial directors...

Increased competition, massive media inflation and generally high increases in the cost of marketing, with so many new platforms coming into play, have made boards of directors sit up and take notice in these tough times.

No longer do they shake their heads at telephone number budgets and put their faith in the hands of marketers who tell them that all will be well. Marketing has always confused most non-marketing board members. They don't understand the language and certainly don't understand why so much marketing is not measured but just implemented on blind faith and the equivalent of spinning a roulette wheel.

Which makes me wonder why so many marketers still insist on adding to this confusion by coming up with terminology that far from sounding good to the people who write the cheques and approve budgets, actually scares the living daylights out of them.

## Scary as hell

Take "growth hacking" for example. It's a perfectly acceptable and successful process used in marketing and among start-ups by using social metrics, analytical thinking and creativity to grow sales.

But, to non-marketers, it sounds scary as hell. Because to them the word "hacking" brings a chill to the spine and is more commonly associated with the terrifying prospect of bank accounts, websites and product development data being infiltrated by cyber-terrorists or competitors bent on destroying their businesses.

The same goes for "native advertising", especially here in South Africa. It's a form of online advertising that matches the form and function of the platform on which it appears. Perfectly acceptable and successful.

But to the uninitiated it has all sorts of negative connotations, the most popular of which I keep hearing is "a BEE advertising agency."

## Speak their language

I suppose the originators of this new-fangled terminology are simply trying to attract attention to what is being portrayed as

innovation in marketing. In pretty much the same way as the public relations industry tried to inject new life by referring to PR as reputation management and heaven only knows how many other monikers in the past couple of decades.

A lot of this is not doing the marketing industry any good. Those boards of directors, CEOs and CFOs who are demanding relevance, return on investment and measurement, need to be addressed in their own language and not the kind of gobbledegook that just makes them irritable.

As it is, marketing is a profession with a particularly low reputation among non-marketers.

And if marketers want to survive they are going to have to start talking in boardroom speak, not marketing speak.

Over the past 10 years or so I have made a point of couching every presentation, strategy or audit report I do in language that accountants and lawyers can understand.

And I have always had a great reception.

Marketing is not a form of magic. It is certainly not about just having big ideas. It is a process, the prime objective of which is to eliminate as much risk as possible when investing in product development, sales and branding.

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

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