

Marketing is in chaos. Especially advertising, PR and sponsorship

 By [Chris Moerdyk](#)

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The marketing environment in South Africa is in chaos. There is no other way of describing the loss of R50bn a year through ill-considered strategy, bad advertising and lack of research.

Adding to their woes, marketers and, in particular, PR people and ad agencies are finding far less success in using unintelligible but great sounding buzzwords to persuade those companies buying their services to blindly follow them.

They are all are breaking the first rule of their own trade by not talking to their target markets in a language they understand.

It's as silly as running Croatian soap powder ads in Peru.

There was a time when CEOs, finance directors and other board members used to let marketers do their own thing with hardly any attempt to try and understand the gobbledegook that is marketing-speak.

The PR industry changed names every few years – from public relations to public affairs, to a litany of contrived nomenclature to try and impress prospective clients.

The ad industry persists today in doing outrageous things both in the media and in public in an effort to demonstrate how 'creative' they are.

And marketers continue to re-invent wheels that are actually 'unreinventable', with monotonous regularity.

It is no wonder CEOs and their board colleagues shake their heads in amusement.

And when they read about that R50bn being wasted on ill-considered marketing every year, they begin to take notice.

Research into the sales potential and brand promotion efficiency of advertising is critical to the success of any campaign. Unfortunately, in South Africa, far too many marketers tend to go with 'gut feel' rather than research which is why 20% of all advertising not only fails but actually damages the brand it is trying to promote.

Unsurprisingly now, more and more board members are beginning to ask questions of their own marketing departments, PR people and ad agencies.

They are demanding that they are spoken to in their own language and that marketers start providing them with credible measurement and return on investment numbers.

When I audit marketing strategies to determine potential wastage in advertising, sponsorship, PR and retail, it is staggering to see just how much money is being wasted. On average, I would say that big companies are wasting anything between 20 and 40% of their marketing budgets.

And nowadays, when I produce a marketing audit report, I couch it in the language of accountants because right now accountants are the people who approve marketing budgets.

So, just how can the market research industry contribute to reducing this chronic wastage of time and money?

I believe that there needs to be a concerted effort to promote the need to get corporate South Africa as well as government, to stop simply basing their marketing and particularly advertising strategy on just coming up with a 'big idea'.

Big ideas without researching the unintended consequences, can turn into big disasters.

But, the target market for this concerted effort should not be marketers or ad agencies but rather the people who actually write the cheques and approve the budgets. CEOs, FDs and executive board members.

There was a time when all of these people just closed their eyes and prayed when they listened to requests for increased marketing budgets or when they were presented with flashy advertising campaigns and asked to trust the instinct of their creators because "you can't really measure advertising."

The point is they can. And they should.

Leaving out the research components is probably the most popular method a lot of marketers have of trying to get more bang for their bucks.

It is suicidal and insane.

Frankly, I would love to see an ad campaign featuring all the marketing disasters that have resulted from not doing homework.

There was a time, not all that long ago when at various stages of production, TV commercials were subjected to some kind of consumer research. Sure, getting opinions from people in the street has its drawbacks and hassles, but on the odd occasion going through the exercise has actually ended up saving the client a heap of money.

Somehow too, many marketers have forgotten that research is critical to the efficiency of marketing. It is not an optional extra. It is an investment that pays dividends but downright dangerous if it is not done properly.

These days every second TV commercial seems to go on air without the agency or client giving too much thought to the real impression it will have on viewers.

Basically, what happens unless an agency and its unsuspecting client are careful, is that the team involved in producing the commercial get so involved with what they are doing that they don't see the wood for the trees. Often, without knowing, they start at the concept stage with an ad that is too long and too expensive. It is then cut down to a say, one minute or 30-second commercial. Now, everyone in the production team knows what was cut out and so the eventual commercial makes sense. But, the poor viewer hasn't the foggiest notion of what is going on because they weren't able to see the cut parts that made the ad make sense.

There are two other areas where a lot of companies fall down. The first is making the mistake of producing a 'once-off'

commercial – unconsciously working on the basis that the ad will only be seen once. The second is wrongfully assuming that viewers will absorb every aspect of a commercial.

Research is the key. Research is not an option. Nor is a marketing audit.

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-FOB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdyk@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at @chrismoerdyk.

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