

Reflecting on 2021 and looking ahead into 2022

 By [Zumi Njongwe](#)

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The pandemic forced many people to hit the reset button and rethink their priorities and purposes as individuals and businesses. The pursuit of purpose by consumers is an excellent opportunity for brands and marketers to rethink how they communicate.



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Second-year into the pandemic, however nostalgic we may be for pre-Covid times, we can start settling into this redefined reality. For brands, the opportunity is in going beyond embracing this present uncertainty as a constant, to imagining a future where we cultivate a sense of limitless possibilities.

That is what makes this moment exciting, and as a marketer, it is my departure point as I reflect on the year passed and look into the future.

Four trends stood out in 2021 and I believe we will see more of them in 2022:

Brands as integrally linked to the good of communities and the planet

The pandemic, for some time, had us pulling together as the human race. Brands that were smart and aware stepped in to help. Much of these activities from brands were CSR engagements, and some were not repeated beyond the first iteration.

In 2022 and beyond, these activities of goodwill are going to shift from being elements of corporate social responsibility to being part of core business operations. More organisations are going to become forces for good, and they will embrace the triple bottom line, bringing together profit, people and the planet.

The local experience never fails to connect

Brands can be shortcuts to people's identities, especially on a continent as culturally rich and diverse as Africa. More brands are going to recognise the currency in local knowledge, and that will echo people's identities in a conscious, deliberate manner. The more brands do this, the more they will be validating and celebrating local cultures. The result? Consumers will feel seen, heard, and acknowledged, building stronger connections with brands.

Brands as a service

Consumers have been demanding more for some time, and brands are finally starting to heed the call. Not enough yet, but there is a shift starting to happen, and I believe it has been driven by digital technologies. Brands are starting to think beyond their product offering, reimagining how they can be more relevant and more useful to people through meaningful services.

Brands as a service (Baas) is a pivoting that extends a brand's reach and connection with consumers and entrenches the brand into people's lives. Google is a good example of a Baas, with its anchor on offering service through technology.

A scaleable multi-niche approach to communication

It's one thing to provide hyper-personalised journeys to a handful of customers but it's quite another to do so at scale, across a customer base that spans multiple countries, languages, and demographics.

The customer experience in near future will be a multi-niche engagement, using data analytics to curate bespoke experience not for the elite few, but for the connected greater public at large. Brands have no excuse for not doing this, and it won't be long before the consumer reminds you.

As we navigate the new year, we need to remember that we need to shape the future and not only reflect the current reality, but we must do it in a way that considers the triple bottom line of business growth.

As our world becomes more complex, ours will be to ensure our contribution to the commercial value of the business is binary but that we hold in our hands the ability to bring these new tenets of thinking to the great work done by many who have come before us. It's a great time to be a marketer.

ABOUT ZUMI NJONGWE

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