

This is the content era



By [Neo Mashigo](#)

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"Stories need to feel real, fresh, consumers are demanding more honesty from brands." - Neo Mashigo co-ECD, O&M JHB.

The search for black talent to tell the real stories of South Africa is the biggest challenge facing advertising agencies and marketers in the next few years and is already impacting on brand relationships, says Neo Mashigo co-executive creative director, Ogilvy & Mather Johannesburg.

Brands need to understand that a closer relationship with their consumers is now the current status quo - and those consumers will let you know, very publically, when they are dissatisfied, as brands have seen with public billboards and the like on social media in recent times, says Mashigo, who has worked across top brands at agencies O&M, Draftfcb, Network BBDO and at the SABC.

Mashigo says the closer consumer interaction is forcing brands in 2015 to be more careful about how they talk to their consumers. "We are going to definitely see consumers engaging on what they like and don't like about brands - vocally. Consumers never used to complain much, especially the mass market, but that has changed and it will force brands to be more careful and think through how they talk to consumers."

On the brand side, Mashigo says we will see a continuation of genuine storytelling efforts and consumer engagement.

"There will be less dependency on music and dancing and shallow stuff, celebrities. Brands will find more ways to engage... to demonstrate why this brand is relevant to your life. As communicators we will have to dig deeper, to the brand itself.

"Most of that is driven by how much more we are engaging with online content, because content forces you to allow people into your space. It chooses when people engage online. It forces a closer relationship with people and the activities we have been seeing with FNB and Cell C, where consumers put up billboards to express their dissatisfaction... We will see more of it."

The real South Africa and African perspective will be visible, reports Mashigo. "My sense is we have been working with a pretentious South Africa where we create a world in our ads that won't work anymore. That fake combined diverse lifestyles. Stories need to feel real, fresh, consumers are demanding more honesty from brands and to reflect more our reality.

"The era of sensationalising things is over. Our world is too close to us. If you are going to sell washing powder, your story

needs to be more real than a laboratory demo, for example, how do you talk to three guys in a flat about washing their clothes?"

Talent search

Mashigo also believes 2015 will be more interesting when data prices drop and people engage more on a mobile device and online.

"This is the era of content. Content requires more detail, a more genuine relationship. You are either my friend or not my friend. It is very difficult to come back from that. That is what is coming. It is a challenge for us.

"The biggest challenge for agencies is the need for black talent, in terms of getting into the core of consumer insights that are more genuine. The thing always driving a fake world, is when you don't know what to do with the real world... because we don't have enough talent to talk to the real world."

Mashigo's advice is that agencies need to be more open to people not traditionally trained in advertising: "We need to find room for them in our agencies or we won't be able to tell those real stories.

"Africa is no longer going to ask permission from the world to determine how we view and see ourselves. We will be seeing - from fashion to music - a whole new 'sound' from brands and consumers!"

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**Neo Mashigo was interviewed by Louise Burgers, specialist editor of Biz Trends 2015.*

ABOUT NEO MASHIGO

Neo Mashigo, chief creative officer for M&C Saatchi Abel, was crowned Industry Leader at the 2019 Adfocus awards held on 27 November 2019.

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