

It is time for marketing professionals to become more innovative

By [Desiree Gullan](#)

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Digital marketing is racing ahead at breakneck speed. With it comes challenges, opportunities and solutions driven by new technologies. From AI and data visualisation to cutting-edge segmentation and contextual marketing; industry players must have a firm grip on the latest trends in the South African digital marketplace.



Desiree Gullan, ECD of G&G Digital.

Here is what you need to know.

SA's digital economy needs TLC

In the last seven years, the number of internet users in South Africa has leaped from 5 million to 22.5 million. [Research](#) suggests this number could double in the next five years. For digital marketing, the future is bright as current users are already spending more than five hours a day online on PCs and tablets, and three hours on mobile phones.

Facing so much potential, marketing professionals must also be mindful of [local challenges](#) like high data costs and skills shortages, especially in technical fields such as analytics. These challenges are hindering growth on both the supply and demand side of the digital economy. Businesses should invest in ongoing education and hands-on experience.

The race to meet on-the-go 'mobile first' needs

SA's fast-growing mobile penetration means marketers should be developing 'mobile first' strategies. Mobile is fuelling on-the-go consumerism and brands have to identify and fulfil these needs. Consumers continue to expect real-time personalised replies and transparency. The brands of tomorrow will be able to meet their needs with real-time relevance.

Intrusive ads must fall

Attention is scarce and consumer patience is wearing thin with unwanted ads. PageFair, the global authority on ad-blocking, indicates that less than 5% of South African browsers use ad-blockers.

However, high data costs make consumers even less tolerant of unsolicited pop-up ads, auto-play videos and excessive retargeting, particularly on mobile phones. It is bound to cause a high drop-off rate and more subscriptions to ad-blockers.

Google aims to maximise user experiences and eliminate low quality content from search results. In 2017, the search engine introduced a new penalty affecting "[intrusive interstitials](#)" on mobile web pages. This year, Google Chrome will block ads that are not compliant with the [Better Ads Standards](#). Advertisers must review their [Best Practices Guide](#) if they want their ads approved.

Content in context is a must

Contextual marketing is the best possible solution to attention scarcity and the future of digital marketing. It places content where it adds optimum value by considering the who, when, where and how of online searches. By taking the user's needs, habits and goals into account, brands can create personalised and on-point messages when consumers need it most.

Human stories make great content

Good content gains attention, but great content drives behaviour. At the centre it contains a fundamental aspect of human nature that viewers can connect with on an emotional level. This not only heightens a viewer's zeal to like and share content,

but builds trust based on a sense of belonging.

To create authentic stories, marketing professionals should first identify the human element of the brand itself and craft stories around how the product or service improves human lives. Some brands have achieved great success turning to social justice stories to drive relevancy and attention.

Video is key to success

Video is naturally engaging and superior at brand storytelling. Research shows that consumers are 64% more likely to make a purchase if they've seen a video of the product and benefits in action. Video traffic will move from 64% in 2014 to over 80% by 2019.

The video storm is hitting South Africa and marketers must break the "video is expensive" stigma. Consumers don't expect Hollywood blockbusters and will shut you down in three seconds if you fail to deliver a compelling hook and valuable content. Whether to entertain, inform, inspire or encourage, marketers should remember that content quality trumps video production quality every time.

On-target marketing with enriched algorithms

Programmatic advertising continues to improve with increasingly sophisticated algorithms that automate and optimise real-time online ad spend. Marketers are shifting to audience-centric media buying strategies that place ads in front of those who have shown an interest or are actively seeking similar offerings.

The state of the digital nation is packed with opportunities. It is time for marketing professionals to become more innovative with their brands and stake their claim in the South African digital marketplace.

ABOUT DESIREE GULLAN

Having worked at the 'Big Three' advertising agencies in SA and proving her creative mettle abroad, Desirée has won multiple local and international awards for her work - including Cannes Lions and Clios. She believes in the importance of craftsmanship - that it's not in the designing, but in the redesigning. Not in the writing, but in the rewriting.

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