

Motivating for a measurement makeover

By [Jacques Burger](#), issued by [M&C Saatchi Abel](#)

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Kids say the funniest things. On a recent trip back from the vet, my six-year-old piped up in the back of the car and casually asked my wife if she had been neutered yet.

It reminded me, after I managed to recover from the hysterical laughter, of a talk that the very inspirational Sir Ken Robinson once gave at Ted, where he shared an equally funny story about a kid getting it completely wrong. The key message was that kids say funny things simply because they don't care if something is right or wrong, they just take a chance. It's only over time, as we become adults, that we develop an understanding of risks, of what can go wrong, of consequences, and of failure. Over time, this deeper understanding of failure ultimately becomes a fear of failure... and failure becomes something we all want to avoid at all costs.



Jacques Burger

Interestingly, the world of advertising seemed to be able to escape this fear of failure for many years. Looking back at the Mad Men days on Madison Avenue, the industry was burdened with very few measures. Much of what happened in the world of communication was new and mystical and far removed from the accountable world of brand linkage scores, click-through rates and sales trackers. In fact, one of the few, and arguably most important measures was whether the audience liked it - and the most important member of this audience, more often than not, was the client's wife.

Of course, this lack of meaningful measures translated into some fairly reckless behaviour by the ad industry - irrelevant ideas, overly indulgent production budgets and a general see-if-we-care attitude demonstrated by arrogant behaviour. But this era also saw some of the most memorable and brilliant work that changed company fortunes forever, work that established some of the most powerful brands the world had ever seen - work that is applauded and referenced today still (which client doesn't want to have their own 'here's to the crazy ones' campaign?).

The sad thing is that, as brilliant as modern day measurements are to prove the value of our industry and to help us be better business partners to our clients, measurement is not just something that applies to success - we can now also very accurately measure failure. What this means is that measurement has become a tool to help us avoid failure, not drive success, a tool to minimise risk, to eliminate the highs and the lows and to even out future results to a point of 100% predictability. What this means is that we would rather not offend someone than have someone fall in love with our brand. We would rather take the same mediocre sales generated last year and implement the same plan than risk something new. Consistency has become more important than creativity, and certainty has been prioritised over genius.

In some ways, the measurements that we have implemented to improve the credibility and value perceptions of the communications industry might be the very thing that is killing it. Measurement should be used to understand what is working and what's not, to help us learn from mistakes, to show us where and how we can improve things. It is not something we should use to eradicate risk, to curb innovation, to defend mediocrity. It should be a tool to determine success, not failure. But how does one do this?

Ideally, one should ask a few key questions around measurement: what am I measuring? Is it about mitigating risk or inspiring fresh new thinking? Am I measuring and taking into account the performances and responses of not just the narrow middle, but also the outliers? Sometimes one learns more from people absolutely hating or loving something as an indication of where to shift communication to.

When measurement becomes a way for us to drive innovation, a way for us to become better at what we are doing, a way of showing off our success, rather than failure, then we might find that we are able to be more like kids again. If we manage

this, we might just enter a new magical era of communication where we can combine science and art - and regain the fearlessness that ultimately produces truly iconic and enduring work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacques Burger is the CEO of M&C Saatchi Abel, Gauteng. With more than 15 years experience in the industry, Jacques has lead some of the most prestigious accounts in South Africa, such as Volkswagen and SAB Miller. As the MD of the Ogilvy Cape Group, he successfully lead an integrated offering which included digital, direct, design and PR. As the CEO of the The Campaign Palace Group in Australia he oversaw internationally recognised and awarded communications for brands such as Target, Panasonic and Westpac (Australia's biggest banking group) and was named one of the Top 40 young marketers in the region. Since Oct 2010, when he founded the M&C Saatchi Abel JHB group, he has lead the growth of the office from startup to over 100 staff members today, handling blue chip accounts such as Edgars, Nedbank and Simba Pepsico.

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