

Remote working and digital-first emerge as key influences in the IAB SA Digital Skills Gap Report

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The IAB SA, in partnership with The Red and Yellow Creative School of Business, has published *The 2021 Digital Skills Gap Report* - an industry-wide survey that highlights the key challenges faced by brands, agencies and publishers alike. As South Africans attempt to find their equilibrium in a world that continues to grapple with the fallout of Covid-19, and in an economy where 42.6%* South Africans are unemployed, the rapid rate of digital adoption facilitated by the pandemic brings equal parts hope and challenge to the industry. The exponential growth in the 'digital-first' approach is a much-needed boon for the industry, but this gain necessitates an availability of the right digital skills - some of which are in critically short supply.

The survey provided several key insights (some suspected, and some a surprise) into current digital skills shortages in the industry.

The biggest skill gap identified lies in data analytics, followed by marketing automation and user experience, a finding which echoes the rapid adoption of a digital-first approach (and an increasing reliance on intelligent, automated technology) by clients and agencies alike. In fact, all of the top skills identified as lacking are those necessitated by a digital world that requires employees to be adept at a range of digital tools and technology, regardless of their role.

As more businesses adopt a remote-working and digital-first approach (a massive 85% of respondents reported that their organisations would continue to operate remotely indefinitely), there is a growing need for soft, interpersonal skills in order for employees to effectively communicate and engage with a remote team. This, alongside the requirement that employees become adept at self-management and self-motivation. Concerningly, an overwhelming 83% of respondents said that they have to provide new employees with digital marketing and advertising experience – regardless of their position or prior experience. This finding is one of several that emphasises the need for improved training and education across the width and breadth of the industry.

Reflecting market trends both globally and on home soil, the top three priorities for South African organisations are: increasing sales, improving innovation and gaining market share. It is encouraging to note that 77% of respondents said that their organisations were open to hiring new graduates – a critical insight that will hopefully facilitate the growth of the industry as a whole.

“The IAB SA Digital Skills Gap Report, in partnership with The Red & Yellow Creative School of Business, is a critical toolkit enabling both an understanding of the digital marketing skills landscape and an opportunity to nurture continuous learning opportunities at a time where it could not matter more. Digitisation has never happened faster than it is happening right now. This opportunity to equip our industry with critical insights on digital marketing skills gives the full digital marketing ecosystem a tangible opportunity to bridge the gap – and beyond,” says Paula Hulley, CEO of IAB SA.

Joey Khuvutlu, MD of Hello Computer JHB, weighs in: “It is our objective and hope that the learnings will be a first step in providing data and insights to inform and encourage closer dialogue between education institutions and industry to accelerate our collective efforts to upskill employees and our youth.”

The 2021 Digital Skills Gap Report is available in its entirety to the industry [here](#).

As part of the IAB SA's mission to grow the South African digital industry, we've built the *2021 IAB Insight Series* to educate and equip industry members with these key digital skills as outlined in the survey. Joey Khuvutlu discusses the key findings of the report (and ramifications thereof) in episode 23, available to watch [here](#):

About the IAB South Africa:

The Interactive Advertising Bureau is a non-profit, non-government industry body based in over 47 countries around the world with the collective vision to empower the media and marketing industry to thrive in a digital economy. We currently represent over 155 local members including online publishers, brands, and educational institutions, as well as creative, media and digital agencies. Our aim is to provide our members with a platform where they can engage and interact with each other and address digital issues of common interest, thereby stimulating learning and growth within the South African digital space. None of this would be possible without both your membership and your participation in our initiatives, platforms, partnerships and projects.

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