

The shiny new thing!

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Advertisers and their agencies are obsessed with innovation, and rightly so. Innovation is what makes us stand out, break through, get noticed in the ever-increasing sea of sameness that is the South African marketing landscape.



However, over the 27 years of my media career I can't help but notice that often innovation is done purely for the sake of it. Money is thrown at the new, the shiny, the flavour of the month, and often very little thought is put into "should we really be doing this" or "how should we be doing this".

Real innovation moves the needle, but more often than not I get the feeling that innovation is being asked for, mandated even, purely as a tick-box exercise and ultimately ends up wasting time, effort, and money. Advertisers can be so obsessed about chasing the new shiny thing, that they often forget to ask themselves the crucial questions:

1. Why are we doing this?
2. Should we be doing this?
3. How are we going to do this?
4. How am I going to measure the success of this?
5. Is this relevant to my target market?
6. Is this going achieve my business objectives?

We are so busy chasing after the new and the different that we can sometimes forget the fundamentals of our business. The basics.

We forget that TV in South Africa still reaches more people than any other media platform. We forget that radio is the most trusted platform of them all. We forget that people spend over 3 hours per day watching TV, and over 5 hours per day listening to the radio. We forget the simple principles of ensuring that we reach enough people enough times for our message to sink in.

“ We forget to understand how much reach is enough. We try and do too much with too little, and then we are surprised when things don't provide the results we expect them to. ”



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I think a big part of the problem is that we are so close to our campaigns, our media plans, our schedules, our creative messages that we tend to get bored with them very quickly and are always wanting to move on to the next big thing. For example, we forget that our target audience maybe see our TV ads three or four times a month, but our clients have been looking at them for weeks and months, on a daily basis, in pre-prods, shoots, edits, and, and, and. So, it makes sense that an ad has barely had one burst of activity before the client wants to change material and flight a new one.

But if we remember the fundamental principles and ensure we get the basics right first, when we do innovate, we will be doing for the right reasons, and it will be far more effective!

For starters, it is a proven fact that reach is the most important media metric of all, more so than frequency, more so than attention. People cannot even consider buying a product if they are not first aware of it; and awareness comes from reach. If we don't get that right first, every other marketing tactic will fail.

“ You can have the best ad in the world, you can have the most innovative product, you can have a plan that provides the perfect frequency, the platforms that provide the best attention...if you don't reach a critical mass of the right people first – it is all wasted effort! ”

And innovation – if it is not done correctly – often comes at the expense of reach. Poorly conceived innovation has very limited reach, it is gimmicky, it is flashy. It looks fantastic in the case study and in the award show, and we all pat ourselves on the back and tell each other how clever we are. But when it all comes down to it, only a handful of people who would probably never have bought the product in the first place will see a very clever ad, in a new and never been used before media platform, but from a business perspective it is little wonder why it never moved the needle.

The solution? We need to use data and we need to trust the data and the insights that we get from it to properly inform our decisions. We cannot be making multi-million-rand media / creative decisions on our own personal experiences, biases, or “sample of one” anecdotes.

To quote my old boss, Sandton is not South Africa, and just because we consume streaming media on our R25K iPhones doesn't mean that all South African's do! Just because our client has discovered ChatGPT doesn't mean that our target market has. Just because our competitors are using TikTok doesn't make it a platform we should be on.

“ Data and consumer insights along with our actual business objectives, should be informing the platforms and channels that we are using. We should be using new platforms because our consumers are there and because they are right for our brand, not because we feel we should be doing something new to impress our stakeholders. ”

By understanding how our consumers use a platform will also inform how we should be using that platform, which will make our messages stand out better and be far more effective.

We can't just take our 30 second TVC and put it on TikTok, because that is not how people use TikTok. They are not there

to watch TV ads, they are there to be entertained and to engage with content. So not only should data inform what platforms are right for our brands and audiences, but we also need to rely on the media owner's knowledge and experience to help us use the platforms correctly.

In short – be innovative, be creative, try new things, be different. But first look at the data, trust the data, make decisions that are based on sound insights (not anecdotal experience), use a platform because your audience is there (not because your competition is there, or because your boss is), ensure it reaches enough of the right people, set the right objectives and KPIs, spend the right amount of money, and show your ads the right number of times.

I guarantee this, more than anything else will move the needle and make you a marketing super star! Not because you are the first advertiser in SA to be on ChatGPT!

Contributed by R. Lord on behalf of The AMF Board About the AMF

The Advertising Media Forum (AMF) is a collective of media agencies and individuals including media strategists, planners, buyers and consultants through whom 95% of all media expenditure in South Africa is bought. The AMF advises and represents relevant organisations and aims to create open channels of communication and encourage and support transparent policies, strategies and transactions within the industry.

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