

The power of curiosity – and other lessons I've learnt

Issued by [TDMC](#)

7 Feb 2024

Duncan Colville is development director at The Digital Media Collective (TDMC) and heads up their team of development experts who focus on building and optimising effective e-commerce stores. An entrepreneur at heart, Duncan has been a key member of the TDMC team for nearly a decade. His insights into the evolution of e-commerce, an undoubted skill for sophisticated site builds and deep knowledge of their influence on the paid digital media landscape are extensive.



There's no doubt that Duncan leans into the nous of his digitally native Gen Z and millennial team members, but much of his ability to lead efficiently is that he has experienced the industry morph at such a rapid pace and has been there for it all. Here, he shares his thoughts on the power of mentorship in his life, the value of curiosity and how he tackles imposter syndrome in the mercurial digital arena.

1. No work experience is wasted

"After graduating with psychology honours, I quickly realised I didn't want to pursue psychology as a career. Instead, I chose to move towards e-commerce and strategic marketing with my post-graduate studies. Later I went into lecturing, then into business and web development when I built my own company," says Duncan. It was in this realm that he first met TDMC founder Cheryl Ingram.

"Cheryl had just started TDMC and I had been straddling web development, advising brands on affiliate marketing and dabbling in Google Ads. She and I clicked. I joined TDMC in 2015 and immediately started immersing myself in the Shopify eco-system, applying what I had learned about the impact of customer behaviour on retail, but with a digital mindset." Duncan's deep understanding of the power of qualitative analysis, on-the-ground consumer marketing and the nuts and bolts of web development proved to be just the skillset TDMC needed to take the business to the next level.

2. Mentorship is priceless – both to give and receive

"Cheryl has been a monumental influence in my career path. She is a taskmaster for sure, but her genuine love for people and high levels of compassion make her a superb leader and mentor," says Duncan. "As my team has grown rapidly from three people to 18 in a relatively short space of time, I am learning how to be both firm and fair. I've realised that being a leader can also be about helping people to set expectations and guiding them to reach them."

Duncan explains that he had to adjust his mindset from a leader-follower model to a leader-leader model in the workplace. “Our subject matter changes in hours and we all need to be privy to the information, changes and opportunities. This means we make a point of never gatekeeping information that can help the team’s development as an entity,” he says.

3. Self-belief is a superpower that requires constant practice

“I am no stranger to imposter syndrome and like so many entrepreneurs have also experienced paralysing bouts of self-doubt,” says Duncan. He learnt to tackle these feelings without losing foothold as a leader by understanding that mindset practices like positive self-thoughts are useful tools during challenging periods. “I’ve started keeping a log of all of my and the team’s successes. This helps me to assess situations in a more measured way. It helps me to practice coming from a place of optimism with the understanding that even for the most complex challenges there is almost always a solution.”

4. The power of curiosity

“The team and I have to consistently work at staying at the forefront of the paid media digital landscape. I am a firm believer that every single day you should learn one new thing – be it a solving a complex problem, gaining insights from an expert or a tech update that has just been released. We have regular story sessions and presentations on new developments and advancements. For these sessions a member of staff researches and presents their findings to the team – these are gold,” he says.

5. Transparency is a building block of success

TDMC is an outspoken proponent of transparency in digital media – ensuring clients have constant access to their paid media platform backends so they can monitor campaigns if they wish. This is a given for every client on TDMC’s books. “We are not afraid to be called out if things don’t go according to plan. Our passion and purpose is using data to constantly improve clients’ footholds in their categories. We pride ourselves on being able to account for every single byte of data that is paid for and to illustrate to clients what their spend has achieved for them,” he says.

As early adopters of Shopify as a paid media platform, TDMC is one of only six accredited Shopify Experts in South Africa – and certainly the most successful independent agency. “It helps that we are pioneers in this space, but more importantly our passion for constantly maximising the platform’s ability to operate with heightened levels of efficiency and innovation is what I think sets us apart. It’s an absolute privilege to lead the way in this exciting and fiercely paced industry.”

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