

Boom, and then there were all these market changes

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Traditional media. Earned media. Media relations. Traditional media. Earned media. Media relations. Traditional media. Earned media. Media relations.



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These are the buzz words and phrases that mostly dominate the corridors of agencies and dare I say, some of the clients' offices we service.

Many clients have even whipped out old examples from what has worked in the past with previous markets in the hopes that it inspires and ignites some fire in the creative minds of the geniuses they have employed through their agencies.

But if we are being honest, real honest here folks, how much of this traditional media, earned media and media relations tactics still work?

If so, are we asking the pertinent questions like, for which kind of brands is it working? How are those deals structured and more so in the South African context, where the very platforms we are meant to be securing earned media opportunities, have equally faced the brunt of a traumatic economic down turn and subsequently having to charge for commercial value at the sight of anything that is brand led or pitched by the PR agencies. Is it actually still fair to use this as the measure of success when this is the reality we are faced with?

I have sat and observed over the last year this growing phenomenon and have become of the view that there are so many changes taking place in our industry and have often wondered, is there anyone who is going to say something about it? Do something about? And is there something that can actually really be done about it?

It seems I have presented us with a borage of challenges, with no sense of solutions, but alas.

Let me try and at least attempt suggesting what we can do in my experience which will hopefully aid both client and agencies in taking us forward.

PR agencies representing brands

- From an agency perspective, it all starts with acknowledging the changes that have taken place in the age of new media and accepting that as PR practitioners, we are no longer the ones that control the narrative, necessarily.
- If anything, the environment we operate in, which is dominated by a digitally savvy consumer who no longer responds to the top-down approach, requires that we collaborate with them for the kind of content they like and will respond to.
- We need to collaborate with content curators across the different tiers to curate meaningful and trending topics that have the potential to get us talkability. A typical example of this is the Woolworths Water Challenge which achieved the earned media coverage tactic without any involvement of brand or agency.
- We need to operate from a place of honesty. The truth is, media platforms are faced with the conundrum of making money and the quickest way they are going to do this is through targeting brands and making them pay for advertising. This has nothing to do with being a great publicist or not. But everything to do with the fact that we are operating in a different environment that requires us to relook the PR model and what it means.
- This is the truth we need to communicate to clients and make them see and appreciate a different way of doing PR without just focusing on traditional media platforms as the only measure of success.

Client being represented by agencies

- It is about understanding the agency offering and aligning the business needs to the right agency.
- Starting paying agencies for the thinking that is further aligned to business needs and will look over and above ticking the boxes. It would be easy for us to follow the traditional way of doing PR but where we are today's PR requires a much more nuanced way of operating and doing things.
- Convergence marketing. Start looking at agencies as an extension of marketing departments and bring them into broader marketing conversations so that they are able to support you accordingly.
- This is further, a great way of upskilling agencies so they are more aligned to your business objectives and are able to come up with strategically sound solutions to business needs.
- Appreciate the counsel and honesty that comes from your specialist, thereby crafting better working ways that will enable you to have more meaningful and impactful work.

There are many ways to go about addressing the status quo but this is but only a few things we should put into action that will allow us to chart a better way forward. After all, who wants to be lagged behind when there are all these changes that could be presenting themselves to us to do and create better work?

ABOUT KHANGELANI DZIBA

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