

Aloha, not goodbye

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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"I am starting again and I love it," says Ken Varejes, commenting on the recent announcement that he is leaving Primedia Unlimited to pursue other opportunities within the media and marketing industry...

Now is my time to get excited again, he says, and already he has opportunities he's considering. First he is off to Namibia and then Australia - "for a business idea" he says. Then some time out at the Rugby World Cup. "Then I will think about new opportunities."

One of these is developing an online retail opportunity for Whisky Live, which he bought earlier this year. The event is the biggest whisky show in the world and South Africa is the seventh biggest whisky market.



Varejes has always been an entrepreneur and willing to consider new concepts, so he started in the media business in the 90s with Star Taxi Music/Taxinet and Comutanet. In 2004 he founded Primedia Unlimited, which today is a company made up of 15 independent and profitable businesses in the out of home (OOH) arena in South Africa and on the continent. Of these Varejes started 11 from scratch.

"When I started I was selling taxi advertising. It was before the era of Mandela and people thought I was crazy. I recall even being chased out of a boardroom in one instance."

He remembers presenting his taxi music concept to a group once. "The group was made up of mainly white guys but there was one black guy. He said that taxi drivers will not listen to my cassettes. I knew the group would believe him and not me."

Not discouraged Varejes ask the guy to do two weeks of research. "I said ask taxi drivers what they listen to and then mail all of us here today the results. He did and he apologised, saying I was right. This turned the game for me."

Today cassettes do not even exist and the taxi business is gone - because of technology. OOH is a dynamic and changing industry in terms of new concepts and new media types and thinking constantly happening. The trick has always been to get people to adapt the concept, he says. "Technology is making this adaption happen quicker, but when you launch a new product it is still a challenge."

Digital is now a reality in everyone's lives and people want digital so it is hard to believe that just a few years ago they were only interested in static billboards, and selling digital was very hard.

He remembers rolling out digital into malls. Malls are points of convergence and where Point of Purchase (POP) takes place, so I thought it would be an easy sell. I could not get the people in the media planning and buying environment to buy into it. That was only seven years ago, today mall media is part of malls. But he says being ahead of technology is not enough. "You have to have the balls to run with it. If it does not work, don't beat yourself up about it. You gave it a shot. By brave and be bold."

As an example he quotes the screens in pharmacies at the dispensary points. "The first year we sold the screens it was impossible. No one was interested. I was pulling my hair out. But that business is flying now. There are so many examples like that. New media requires you to be brave and bold. And if you can't then don't be in this game."

He is excited by the opportunities in the future. "I am starting again and I love it. I have been in the game so long that I know the good guys, and will lock in with them. People around you are a big part of this business."

"It's time to get out there and do stuff."

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

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