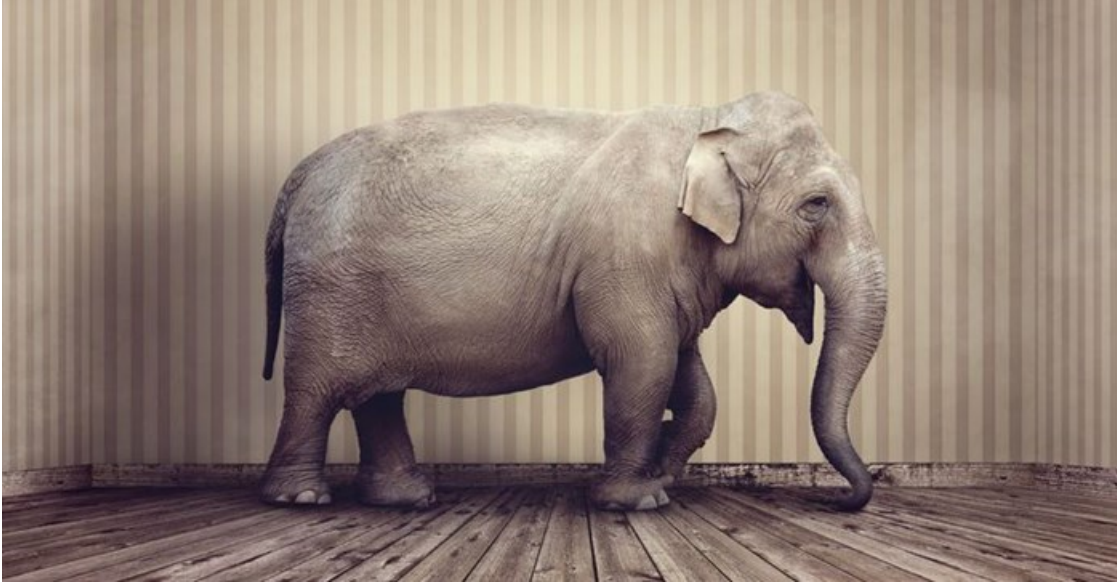


The elephant in the room - The role of digital

"The elephant in the room remains the unanswered question of 'what is the role of digital in the industry'," says current FM AdFocus Awards chairperson, Craig Page-Lee.



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The importance of digital, and specifically mobile, has been a key thread throughout this year's entries, he says. "All agency categories demonstrating evidence of delivery in this regard, irrespective how successful the campaigns and submissions were."

There is still a way to go before we see agencies being able to deliver seamlessly through the coupling of these concepts and trends, he adds. "Probably because every agency is clinging-on for dear life to their respective 'piece' and area of focus just to make it through an incredible difficult time economically and spare heads being cut – the default rectification mechanism of the bigger internationally owned groups."

Investment in big data

Unfortunately, investment in big data and analytics systems still seems a long way off in SA, and how to use it effectively remains somewhat of a mystery to most, both on client-side and within these agency groups.

While many agencies did demonstrate some reference to data use, he says it was again only in relation to their respective scope and deliverables and not part of the overall communications strategy.

The media agencies did however demonstrate a higher level of data and analytics understanding. "Did this help them deliver more integrated omni-channel based campaigns? Not necessarily."

He adds that while the digital agencies obviously understood the power of the platform, they weren't able to backward-or-forward integrate the big idea across these touch-points. "As such, we only saw brilliance in isolation."



FM AdFocus Awards chairperson, Craig Page-Lee.

Over the past year to 18 months a number of trends have been key in influencing the industry. "Some specifically being driven by technology enhancements like chatbots and programmatic, others by the need to place the consumer at the heart of product engagement and experience like virtual reality and AI."

Three concepts that stand out

However, the three concepts that have stood out, and when coupled, create a powerful way to connect with consumers and stay relevant across the entire experience journey, are not new but a heightened focus and rigorous application of the principles make them stand-out as key trends.

"The coupling of data ('big or small'), channel integration (omni-channel) and dynamic message delivery (automation – responsive and reactive) has allowed brands to connect with consumers to address their needs state in a more purposeful way, seamlessly delivering different levels of value and relevance across the various stages of the consumer experience journey."

When you look at the constituent components of the advertising industry, one can see how the three concepts mentioned above create a framework to bring it all together, from understanding where to connect with consumers, in which way, on what device; delivering which content, in what format, at what time – and rewarding consumers for consuming and sharing this content; to leveraging technology platforms such as data analytics, real-time buying – or programmatic – to enhance the accuracy of engagement, message delivery and ultimately return on investment.

Every campaign should be built around digital

This is a clear indication that total integration and omni-channel delivery is not a given in South Africa. "If it was, there would be no question around the relevance of digital as everything is digital and every campaign should be built around that, irrespective of where the big idea is generated, or where the strategy is driven from," he says.

"With all of this in mind, the elephant in the room remained the unanswered question of 'what is the role of digital in the industry' and should it have a stand-alone award moving forward?"

Page-Lee has been directly involved in the FM AdFocus Awards programme since 2015, having taken over from Festus Masekwameng as jury chairperson for the period 2016 and 2017. He is the founder of d-cifr, an independent marketing and communications consultancy.

The FM AdFocus Awards 2017 takes place this Wednesday, 22 November, at The Empire, Hill on Empire in Johannesburg, Gauteng.

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