

Being the man in the supermarket

 By [Senzo Xulu](#)

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I remember once being in the electrical aisle at a local supermarket and noticed a man, somewhat confused, standing in front of the battery section. Having worked on a battery brand for a few years I found the temptation to assist him too great to resist.



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After a potentially awkward introduction was avoided, I asked him if he needed help choosing the right battery. He said yes and stated the device he intended to use the batteries in. He then pointed out his preferable choice of a battery (he chose on price). I understood where he was coming from and advised him, trying not to sound like a salesman, that the batteries he was considering weren't the best match for his device. I went as far as showing him the device icons on the reverse of each pack – he never knew these existed. So, he agreed that the batteries he was considering weren't ideal, but then he said he'd buy them anyway. I couldn't understand. He knew that what he was buying wouldn't last as long as another option but paying R20 more was too much of a sacrifice (even though he'd have to buy batteries again sooner than he would if he went with the better option).

Embracing a 'New Earth'

History tells us that many civilisations, as recent as 17th century China, had concrete evidence to substantiate that planet Earth was flat. The idea prevailed throughout both Western and Eastern philosophy and can be traced back as early as the days of Homer. It's true that we've progressed in the understanding of the world but this has always been within the context of the knowledge that was at our disposal. In other words, only the present and available knowledge of the philosophers, scientists and gurus of each era has determined the way that mankind has articulated the world and its mysteries. It makes perfect sense except in the scenario that these 'knowledge-setters' are wrong. From the 12th century until the 17th, China lived in the cloud of an error. While the rest of the world moved on and embraced the fact the Earth was spherical, they did not.

Three hundred years later, we're unlikely to even consider the possibility that the flat Earth theory could in any way be true because what we know today is contrary to what was thought to be correct back then. Think about those scientists, as well as normal citizens, who had to wake up one day and, through the irrefutable new evidence brought forth regarding the shape of the Earth, believe something new. Their whole paradigm about the Earth and the planets had to do some significant shifting to accommodate the newly presented knowledge.

The cost of new knowledge

Seemingly, we are generally welcoming to receive knowledge when it does not compromise or challenge our comfort zones. Chinese astronomy has always been held in high regard throughout history but when a new stream of knowledge that came to challenge the flat earth theory, their astronomical prowess became vulnerable. If the earth wasn't flat, then that would have implications into what they already knew and were known to know, so it took them until the 17th century to revert on that age-old idea.

For the man in the supermarket, knowing something new about the appropriateness of battery choice wasn't worth R20 and a longer performing device. Saving money seemed like a far more beneficial option despite the impending drawbacks. This of course, has implications for the effectiveness of advertising to actually change consumer behaviour. Is it enough when consumers merely know about your product or its benefits? As an industry, we too have a responsibility to make the most of the things that we know and to be prepared to make changes against what we cherish and believe to be the non-negotiables of our industry. Even if it costs us an extra R20.

ABOUT SENZO XULU

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