

Start worrying about the digital revolution

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The South African advertising industry faces tremendous pressures from the digital revolution, changing consumer behaviour and shareholders' obsession to make quick 'bucks', delegates heard at Tony Koenderman's quarterly 'Brainstorm' seminar in Johannesburg last week.

Held at the Wanderers Club in Illovo, 10 October 2007, Ross Chowles, Jupiter creative director, said that shareholders' demands had no conscience and were not patriotic.

"We are obsessed with awards, good people are emigrating, older and experienced guys are quitting, leaving the industry in the hands of young folks who have no kids, just bought or in the process of buying their first car and are still renting," Chowles added.

"Technological advances and all the above factors are really putting enormous pressure on us, and as a result, the industry is shrinking, which means less jobs and less quality adverts that fail to engage consumers adequately. We have forgotten how to sell and how to convince. So, we need to adapt fast and urgently to stay competitive."

Big ideas, big ideals

And to adapt and overcome problems such as these, the advertising industry needs big ideas and big ideals, Robyn Putter, worldwide creative head of WPP Group, said.

"The way we go about marketing and advertising nowadays is in fact illogical. We must not try to rationalise things that cannot be easily rationalised in our industry but try to create the right environment. Big ideas happen randomly not in the logical process," Putter said.

"Companies are led by customers not by intuition. In order not to lose our business, ask customers what you should do for them.

"Advertising informs but does not inspire. Brands are led by more evolved thinkers and thinking is process-driven and brands are more about function. Let's raise our performance," Putter said.

"Add meaning to your brand – then you earn more money because a brand spirit is almost religious... In our business, doing something right can change the fabric of society."

Big resources

But many delegates believe that big ideas can only bear fruit if they can be matched with big resources, especially during this period of the 'rise of machines'.

"We need to worry about the impact of the digital revolution, be ready for it and strive to create successful advertising in this digital world, where machines and its collaborative tools control us," Brazil's Fernanda Romano, executive director of Lowe Worldwide New York, told the sold-out audience.

"Technology can make a huge difference in the advertising industry. But to succeed, it has to be a two-way messaging: ask audiences to tell you what they think, make them collaborate and enhance social networking and they help will you craft your message, endorse your brand, ask you for more interesting advertising, participate in your promotion and search for you."

Furthermore, Alan Knott-Craig, CEO of Vodacom, also emphasised the impact of mobile advertising, something he said has had a huge response from Vodacom customers.

Knott-Craig said that cellphone advertising has many advantages because of its high exposure, dense penetration, advertiser's flexibility and consumer access, and accurate, timeless, immediate response and campaign flexibility.

Cellphone advertising's benefits also include frequency (one-on-one marketing capability) and its contextual and demographic targeting, he said.

Additional guest speakers included Andy Rice of Yellowwood Brand Architects and Gail Curtis of Saatchi & Saatchi SA. The event was organised by Koenderman, Terry Barker and Marcia Minnaar, with the sponsorship from *FinWeek*, Lowe Bull and Clear Channel.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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