

The frog in the pot

 By [Chris Botha](#)

2 Dec 2015

Wow, how fast the world changes! This fact was made more evident once again when a few days ago, my mentor and friend, Harry Herber gave me a copy of the March 1998 *Advantage* magazine. (Remember it, courtesy John Farquhar?)

Paging through the magazine, there were some interesting things that popped up:

- This particular issue was 96 pages, of which probably 45 were FPFC ads. If I remember correctly, the last issue of *Advantage* did not have a single FPFC ad in it.
- The faces in the magazine - Harry Herber, Virginia Hollis, Gordon Muller, Linda Gibson, Mike Glover - all looking young, fresh and excited. Now, I'm attending Harry's retirement lunch.
- Then there's the famous "movers and shakers" section. The sign that you made it in this industry. 35 young faces, 33 of which were white.
- An awesome ad for the new Apple Power Macintosh - "with a 192mb of memory, and a 512k backside cache." Unbelievable! It also had, I noticed, a slot for floppy discs. (Remember those?)

That was the world of 1998.

The world of 2015 looks a whole lot different.

The media landscape is unrecognisable. Consumers now spend more time with digital media (in whatever shape) than ever before. Facebook announced this week that they have in excess of 13 million users in South Africa, of which 8 million log on daily. Oh, and an even scarier stat, the average daily user logs on 14 times per day. Terrifying!

33 out of 35 appointments being white people in the year 2015? I think not! We now live in a country where the profile of the workforce has changed significantly since 1998. Now, the majority of the workforce is black. According to the latest AMPS survey, white South Africans now make up less than 15% of the "full-time employed" population of the country. Plus, I'm sure you know, the white population now makes up only 10% of the total population.

And this is where the frog enters - the famous amphibian that gets placed in a pot with cold water, where it sits calmly. Ever so slowly, the water around him heats up, and oblivious to his surroundings, he gets cooked without knowing it. Unfortunate.



© Sascha Burkard – 123RF.com

But what's more unfortunate is that I seriously believe that our communications industry too is a frog. The world around us is changing, but so much of what we do is still exactly the same as it was in 1998.

At the last count, digital media accounts for less than 10% of advertising spend while print still accounts for more than 20% of media spend. When last did you buy a newspaper? And a magazine? Yes. But when last did you log onto Facebook? So the waters around us are fully digital but we somehow believe we are still living in a paper world.

Communication agencies (including our own), still have digital departments. I made a massive faux pas on a recent trip to the USA when I asked my Detroit counterpart where their digital department sits. He laughed, and innocently asked what a digital department is. Digital is not a separate service. They have truly integrated the platform into every element of their business. But here we sit. Still with digital departments (in media, sales and marketing, let's be honest). As long as there is such a 'thing' as a digital department, the medium will never grow and our agencies will never truly offer the consumer what they need. So here is my wish for 2016 - #DigitalDepartmentsMustFall. I have to defend the WHY, we The MediaShop, still spin the digital strategists and buyers out. We do it because the market wants to see "experts". So we package our digital experts separately. Again I say, #DigitalDepartmentsMustFall!

We have to act before the consumer walks away from advertising completely. There's every sign that the consumer is finally just getting plain bored with the simplistic approach that worked for decades. We really need to truly adapt what we do, to the way the 2015 consumer spends his or her life. ALL OF US. I have a personal agenda to make sure that in the next five years the "Digital Department" at The MediaShop closes down. Media strategists and planners should all be able to fulfil the entire media function holistically, and no element should be "outsourced". We don't need media strategists or digital strategists. What we require desperately are communication strategists!

But enough of that. Let me move onto the other change that's happening in the world, but not so much in the media industry.

REAL transformation. Not the 'bull' that is put into the numbers for award purposes, but meaningful, tangible change.

A few nights ago I was at The Annual AdFocus Awards held in Sandton. A lovely evening of pomp and ceremony, lauding the achievements of the entire media and advertising fraternity. I couldn't help but feel though, that large parts of the evening resembled the "Movers and Shakers" page of 1998. Remember - 35 white folks, and two faces of colour. Here's a prediction. It's noticeable that there's been a leadership shake-up at some of SA's media agencies of late. We've seen 4 MDs of media agencies who have resigned this year alone. What I'm keen to see is how many people of colour will end up taking their places. My bet? 0, zero, none, nada!

Our industry needs to make a massive, concerted and sustained effort to get black South Africans leading the charge. This involves us passing the ball to the black talent, and letting them run with it. I took over the reins at The MediaShop when I was 33. How many of the leaderless agencies in SA will have the guts to pass the ball to the 33-year-old black kid? We are all doing a lot on training, a lot on educating, but not enough on promoting. That is where we need to change, and fast.

The water in the pot is seriously reaching boiling point, but the frog inside seems to remain oblivious.

Let's make 2016 the year where exponential change happens in our world. Let's not boil away. Let's jump out, knock the lid off, and really change the world.

Note that Bizcommunity staff and management do not necessarily share the views of its contributors - the opinions and statements expressed herein are solely those of the author.

ABOUT CHRIS BOTHA

Chris Botha is Group Managing Director, The MediaShop, Johannesburg. Chris started his life in media when he was a student at the University of the Free State. He ran the local campus radio station (RSPM) and was the proud presenter of the sport show.

- The sad state of (new) news - 27 Sep 2021
- Crazy times change behaviour. Forever. - 9 Jul 2020
- The short to medium-term impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the SA media environment - 18 Mar 2020
- Emotional clickbait always wins - 12 Mar 2020
- The dilemma of leadership in the advertising and media industry - 16 May 2019

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>