

Planning for the 'big switch' in TV

By  Mzi Deliwe

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South Africa is in the midst of the "big switch" from terrestrial television broadcasting infrastructure to digital terrestrial (DTT).



Source: www.unsplash.com

While the migration to digital has been completed in the Free State, Northern Cape, North-West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga, some 4 million TV sets countrywide still only receive analogue signals. These will need a set-top box to convert the digital signal for viewers to continue watching. (The alternative is to buy a digitally supported TV set).

Sign-ups for set-top boxes (STBs) subsidised by the state have been slow. In fact, there is little awareness of the need for the boxes, especially within the groups most likely to be affected, i.e., lower to middle-income households.



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In addition, the global shortage of chips, along with logistical challenges, means that there is now an insufficient capacity to satisfy the looming need for digital decoders in South Africa.

All of which suggests that if the switch were to take place now, an estimated 5.6 million household viewers reliant on analogue transmission would lose access to free-to-air broadcasts – according to the BRC.

The March 2022 deadline has therefore been moved to June 2022, with the SABC arguing that it is “premature” and presents an “unsustainable risk” to lower-income households.

This gives advertisers some breathing space. Nevertheless, the possibility of a drop in audience numbers remains. As such, it is important to plan ahead to minimize the potential impact of this.

Digital place-based TV networks

Digital place-based media, particularly in highly frequented environments with high dwell times such as malls, taxi ranks and train stations, can help advertisers to maintain engagement with this audience. More specifically, digital TV networks – such as Mall TV and Transit TV – offer brands a platform on which to air their TV content.

Usually, we recommend digital place-based networks as an addition to TV advertising, to build incremental reach and frequency across media. This creates constant brand awareness, leading to higher consideration and influencing brand loyalty and selection. But, in this case – with the digital migration deadline looming – we believe this media can step up to reach audiences that are most likely to be lost.

A 2017 study commissioned by Milward Brown on the effectiveness of digital place-based networks, draws several important conclusions about the synergy between such networks and TV. The study notes that campaigns which achieved a TV reach of 70%+ and included digital place-based media, all benefitted from double (or triple) campaign frequency, due to high overlaps in TV and digital place-based media exposure.



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So, digital place-based media can be used to supplement TV advertising; it may also serve as a means to reach TV audiences, if and when they lose access to TV.

In addition, the study showed digital place-based networks were able to deliver incremental reach above TV, ranging from 8% to 50% – proving that investment in this media also offers a way to connect with audiences who cannot be reached on TV.

The study further notes that brands wishing to target lower and mid-income audiences can expect GRP (gross rating point – reach x frequency) delivery anywhere from 900 to 2000 GRPS, depending on the digital packages and timeframe chosen.

Move into malls and transit hubs

Digital place-based media, therefore, offer a way of staunching the loss of audience during the potential disruption brought by the big switch. And the most effective locations for this are middle-market malls and transit hubs.

First, this is where you will reach the audience most likely to be “lost” when analogue TV is switched off, that is, lower to mid-income groups. Second, the high audience numbers and long dwell times in both malls and bus or rail stations mean that people have time to engage with TV content.



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Mass market malls primarily cater for LSM 5-8 consumers (around 80% of urban adults). Post-lockdown, these spaces are attracting greater footfall, with people heading to their local mall for shopping and leisure. On average, consumers make 6.9 visits to a mall each month, and spend around two hours there; if consumers lose access to free television, these numbers may grow further, as more people head to the mall for entertainment.

Similarly, 80% of those who use public transport fall within LSM 5-7, and travel to work 5 times a week, twice a day – providing an excellent frequency. Within transit hubs, the average dwell time is 40 minutes, again reaching an audience looking for distraction while they wait.

Plan for success

While the media industry is undergoing extraordinary change, the fundamentals of planning, reaching audiences and creating brand awareness and recall are still the same. It's crucial to understand your audiences – where will you find them? where are they most likely to consume your content? – and invest wisely to optimise conversion.

Given the nature of the audience most likely to be lost during the migration, we believe that digital place-based networks in malls and transit environments offer an effective way of maintaining contact between brands and their audience during this period.

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