

BMW: Transforming to a digital, customer-centric approach

By  Danette Breitenbach

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BMW South Africa sold its first car online in January 2020 following a digital transformation to ensure that it was in line with a customer-centric approach.



Supplied: Nikita Achadinha, BMW brand manager at BMW Group South Africa

With the world moving to digitalisation BMW recognised that the world was changing rapidly and with it consumer behaviour. To ensure it remained relevant, especially to the consumer, the brand needed to adapt.

It was a massive mind shift for the company says Nikita Achadinha, BMW brand manager at BMW Group South Africa, who was involved in the transformation.

A speaker at the recent New Generation Awards #NewGenTrends in Marketing Conference, held at The Venue, Melrose Arch in Gauteng, she says that South Africa was the pilot market for the online platform that would eventually be used by BMW all over the world.

Achadinha joined the company a decade ago to develop the content / media strategy to ensure lead targets and engagement objectives were met.

"I was fired up for digital transformation and soon realised that the business was not quite there yet and that, like most brands jumping on the social media bandwagon at that stage, the focus was on growing follower bases on channels," she says.

Turning everything on its head

When the call to digitally transform came she says the organisation had to look at itself critically. "It was hard work, with many late nights because we knew just how important this was going forward," she says.

It meant turning everything on its head from internal processes and systems to the dealers as well as an organisational restructure. Teams were changed and set up to serve the new business model. This included bringing in new skills, transforming existing roles and evaluating the relevance of some.

The company developed a new marketing strategy, onboarded a data team, built a system to collect data and employed a media planner. "The data would inform our marketing strategy. Our eventual goal was for everything to work together like a well-oiled machine," Achadinha says.



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Testing the waters

As part of the new marketing strategy, it was decided to launch the campaign to the public. A campaign was developed by their lead marketing agency, Wunderman Thompson, and was called "BMW Anywhere". The idea was to demonstrate that one could purchase a BMW from anywhere now that sales were online.

"The plan was for the marketing campaign to go live in March 2020, but Covid had other ideas."

Besides Covid, she adds they also faced several other challenges including the Russia-Ukraine conflict, over and above everything already going on in South Africa.

High expectations

Once they went live, expectations were high.

"When the results did not come in instantly, management was concerned. We had never sold cars in this way," she says. But says Achadinha, their perseverance really paid off as they are starting to see the results today.

"In terms of marketing the new system allows us to better our communications with a 146% better creative performance and 85% lower creative production costs," she says.

"In terms of sales of vehicles online, we found that consumers will engage with the brand if the offering is relevant to them when they want it and only then will it lead them down the purchase funnel. For us, this is a three to six months journey," she explains.

Looking back she says the success of their digital transformation was because they were able to drive the transformation agenda, were motivated, and had proof of results. "When your management has a clear vision and makes it their mission to understand what you are doing, then it filters down easily and this leads to success," she says.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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