

Why data-driven creative projects fail and 3 steps to ensure success

Forward-thinking brands are leaning into data-driven creative (DDC), where companies can create digital assets that offer an almost limitless amount of variations, and which can be changed up quickly and cost effectively depending on the consumer's circumstances. To put it simply, DDC helps target audiences with the right content at the right time and on the right channel. On the fly.

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However, while benefits of DDC should be obvious to any marketing leader, many South African brands are struggling to complete their DDC projects over the line.

These are the reasons why and three actions that can be taken to ensure success.

Low digital maturity is holding companies back

Unfortunately some brands are still using unsophisticated data collection methods and only doing surface level segmentation like page views, and page engagement.

When it comes to DDC, good delivery hinges on audience strategies, messaging strategies, and measurement strategies. While some brands are getting the customer segmentation right, many (around 80 to 90 percent), have not yet hit the digital maturity level where they are properly tapping into audience personas and without these, DDC is not possible.

Before any kind of DDC work can begin, brands must address their data - and most urgently, their first party data.

First you have to know what you have

The first challenge is for companies to understand what data they have, where it comes from and how they can access it.

Many organisations have terabytes of data that could be used to help them build the foundations for effective DDC rollouts. The problem is that it sits across the business, in different departments and often locked into multiple, siloed systems.

A data audit is an essential first step. Once the data has been identified a frank discussion with all stakeholders is necessary to ensure everyone knows why the data is required, how it will be used and what benefits the company will see as a result of the DDC efforts.

These conversations must be had with more than just the teams who are responsible for all the digital properties. Talks must include those who are responsible for the compliance of the data, including the legal teams.

This part of the process should not be underestimated. Some financial institutions can take upwards of six months to get sign-off on DDC efforts simply because of delays in securing the legal department's buy-in.

Getting territorial about tech

Another inter-department challenge that can stall efforts is around which measurement technology is used.

In many enterprises, but particularly the larger financial organisations, Adobe Analytics is the preferred embedded measurement technology. This can be a problem when it comes to activating advertising as it doesn't easily link to the Google environment. This technology conversation is a very sensitive one and is best led by a digital marketing specialist who can allay concerns. We have found that by implementing GA4 in parallel we are able to activate and optimise marketing efforts without disrupting the business analytics or compromising the ability to serve contextual advertising.

Internal support is key

An integral part of getting a DDC project off the ground is to ensure that you have the necessary support from within the organisation. Having a high-level DDC sponsor who is able to clearly motivate the reason for the work to the board - as we ensure that all department heads buy into the work that will be required of them and their teams - is essential.

Then, having a DDC champion who is able to facilitate all the requirements at team level is also crucial. A single point of operational contact lowers the risk and enables effective delivery in the shortest possible time.

Building internal skills

The very best way to see a good return on the investment is for brands to build internal creative skills. Making use of agencies to develop all the necessary creative would cost a fortune. It makes sense to still work with the creative agency, where they have the big idea, but the day-to-day creative delivery resides in-house.

Working with a specialist agency to determine the internal team's KPIs and to ensure proper training can ensure a faster, more effective setup. What's more they can also accelerate the learning process by building the first campaign while the internal teams learn as they go.

This process not only allows CMOs to quickly get a DDC project up and running, but also means they can slash production costs and time to market too.

To sum up. Before a brand can begin their DDC journey, they must take three vital steps.

1. Conduct a data audit. This allows them to find out what data they have, where it resides and what systems it resides in.
2. Get the buy-in of the relevant stakeholders. Educate them about the project, why it is important, and their role in making it happen.
3. Establish clear objectives and appoint an internal sponsor who can advocate for the project at board level, along with an internal champion to drive delivery.

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