

Africa - One on one

 By [Cobus van Zyl](#) 10 Jun 2014

Fairfax Cone once said: "Good advertising is always written from one person to another. When aimed at millions rarely moves anyone." (video)

I think the sad truth about advertising in Africa is, for many years, big brands have done just that. Aimed the same message at an audience of a billion people, with different levels of comprehension, different cultures, languages, religious beliefs, customs etc.

Africa is even sometimes referred to in a manner that suggests it *is* one country. Statements like, "We will launch our new product in China, India, and Africa concurrently" has often made me wonder about the thought invested in understanding Africa's 54 different countries. Assuming they are the same would be like assuming all children are the same, because they seem the same when screaming together on a jumping castle at a party.



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This cursory view of Africa will be challenged, more and more, as companies turn to the third world for economic growth opportunities. The availability of more information, thanks to high speed internet, and greater disposable income, will produce a much more demanding, and discerning consumer, than the Africa of old.

A language they understand

It's a consumer who wants you to talk to them in a language they understand. I believe only the brands that understand them and can connect with their audience in a meaningful way, will succeed long term.

So who is this person we are talking to? How do we better understand their mindset and, most importantly, how can we connect with them? This is the part that is much easier said than done. Due to the lack of research, documented trends, a general material on sociology, this is partly guesswork at this stage. What I do know is that the biggest mistake you can make is to assume the content of the book, based on its cover. E.g. it might be the man who looks like he cannot afford the shirt on his back, who is a hard working trader in the informal market, and highly likely to purchase a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label on the way home.

In fact, in many cases there is very little correlation between outward appearance and net worth. I call it the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde phenomenon, and understanding this will be key to marketing, for instance, luxury brands in future. Luxury brands by the way, are set to grow in turnover by 11% over Africa in 2014*. That's €2 billion in one year.

This insight is illustrated beautifully in the recent Guinness TV advert. It tells the story of the Sapeurs, hardworking blue-collar workers by day, and three-piece-suit wearing, style icons by night. If you have not seen it yet, grab a coffee and watch it your next break!

It leaves you wondering though, how do I connect with this consumer?

1. More accurate target audience profiling

Working on projects where the brief states that the target audience is as generic as "50/50 male/female, 18-35, urban dwellers", will not be good enough going forward. More time has to be spent defining our audience psychographically. We have to ask questions like, what other brands influence our audience daily? How does the audience differ in other parts of the country? What is the primary, secondary, tertiary audience even within a small range like 18-25 etc.?

Without a detailed, and well thought through target audience analysis and profile, we will continue to create broad communication which will be "aimed at millions, rarely moving anyone".

2. Local insight

The answer to connecting with the local audience is local insight. Local insight can only come from one place, the locals! The trick is the insight they can offer has to be mined. It will not just jump out and stare you in the face. You have to ask the right questions. Searching for local truths, and historic beliefs about the product and category you are to launch your campaign in, can help.

What do people believe about the product? How is it different from other markets? Does it differ from region to region?

The key is to be curious and keep probing. Remember (if you are not a local), the person you are interviewing has lived here forever. The insight you are hunting for, that may fuel a whole campaign, could be something they consider quite ordinary and mundane!

3. Strategy

Take the time to craft your strategy so it will inform communications that resonates with as many people as possible. Through acknowledging individualism within the greater audience, and planning accordingly, you will experience much better results. As one of my clients put it the other day, we have to understand our audience to the extent that we can create a campaign that speaks to the "me" *within* the "we".

4. Regional media planning and message tailoring

In the past, brands that customised their message to be more relevant per country did better than the ones who followed the shotgun approach. This could have been expected. However, in future even this will not be enough. The reason is most countries have hundreds of tribes and languages and are simply not as homogenous as many western countries.

Remember the ink is still drying on the borders drawn for Africa. In my opinion most African countries still struggle with the practical implications of the foreign concept of "being a country."

According to the latest TAMPS, Tanzania has 85 radio stations. Many of these are, obviously, regional. Understanding who listens, even if it's not a big audience, and planning your media initiatives and material accordingly will have results you can never match by simply sticking the same advert on the biggest radio station you can find.

Of course all this means a lot of extra work for the marketing department and agency teams, but the reward will be breaking through to consumers you never knew existed, with something that's meaningful.

I view it as a great opportunity as this change in approach must, and will, take place. The question is only if your brand will be a pioneer in this move, or a follower a decade from now?

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