

# Media strategist vs. Medium specialist

By  Sanele Mjaga

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Over the past couple of years, well since I've been aware of the goings on of this here industry, I've noticed this growing trend of separating the advertising media world based on the so-called "traditional" and "new media".

When it comes to recruiting, there's social/digital media managers, social/digital media strategists, planners, etc. but what I never seem to understand is the difference and need to separate the advertising digital world from the advertising media world which know, understand and love...even more so, the need for digital practitioners to separate themselves and their medium/trade from the "rest of us".

I often like to get proper definitions of topics when discussing or debating something, either with myself or with others, in order to get all parties on the same page of what it is we're discussing (yes, even when I'm having mental discussions with the voices in my head... please don't judge me), so here goes...



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Media strategy on a broad view, is simply defined as being *"concerned with how messages will be delivered to consumers or niche markets"*. A more detailed definition lines out that *"media strategy involves identifying the characteristics of the target audience or market, who should receive messages and defining the characteristics of the media that will be used for the delivery of the messages, with the intent being to influence the behaviour of the target audience or market pertinent to the initial brief."*

Now from both the broader and the more detailed definitions, unless I'm mistaken, the common denominator is the audience/markets being targeted and not necessarily the type of medium used. From my understanding, the type of medium(s) to be used is a result of thorough interrogation of the targeted audience, their behaviours, habits, purchasing patterns, etc. The audience characteristics define the medium(s) which will be selected in the planning process, rather than the medium defining the audience, therefore why is it that we seem to slowly be falling into the trap of the latter?

While various factors affect the overall media strategy, as discussed above, the audience remains the core of the strategy and not the medium, yet we have created jobs that are defined by their respective mediums rather than the trade itself. A social/digital media strategist is like being a TV/radio/print/OOH/cinema/mobile strategist, defined by a medium and not the trade.

Imagine a world where we have radio strategists, TV strategists, OOH strategists, print strategists, cinema strategists, mobile strategists, etc., would these people still be considered media strategists? Do they still possess the attributes that are necessary for one to complete the responsibilities of a "media strategist", or have they become "medium specialists"? After all, they specialise with one medium within a plethora of media...and while I fully do agree that specialists in each medium are necessary to obtain deeper insights and understanding of how to use each of them individually, an overarching specialist who still operates on the principles and the base of media strategy is necessary to be able to manoeuvre across this fragmented media environment.

The separation of digital/social media personnel (and more specifically media strategists) from other "traditional media" strategists basically insinuates that digital and/or social media strategies are detached from the overall media strategy, ultimately meaning that a traditional media strategist cannot possibly do digital/social strategy because well, that's a specialised medium. Afterall, how can you possibly fit digital and/or social media into your overall advertising media strategy when you don't understand digital media?

Now with that comes the question, what then exactly is the media strategists role in the greater scheme of things within this advertising industry, does it still involve being concerned with finding the best ways to deliver the clients overall message regardless of media, or has it "evolved" so much that it has withered into specialising in specific mediums rather than a diversified media catalogue?

I find a media strategist should be a media strategist and be able to perform the responsibilities of a media strategist, regardless of medium and detaching digital media strategists from the "rest of the media advertising world" might not be in the best of interest to all involved....

## ABOUT SANELE MGAGA

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