

SA as a launchpad for talking to Africans in Africa

By [Gau Narayanan](#)

21 Feb 2018

Boniswa Pezisa, BBDO South Africa group CEO, and I, recently chatted to an executive MBA class from Wharton Business School (University of Pennsylvania, USA) about using South Africa as a hub for growing into the rest of Africa. The class hoped to gain insights into doing business in South Africa, as well as the opportunities and challenges that local and multinational companies see across the continent.



Boniswa Pezisa, BBDO South Africa group CEO and Gau Narayanan, Net#work BBDO MD.

Approaching the brief from our point of expertise, Boniswa and I used one premise as the starting point for our discussion: *Viewing Africa as a homogenous continent is setting yourself up for failure.* Africa is a collection of countries, all with different cultures, languages and dialects, social and educational challenges, political frameworks, and levels of infrastructure development.



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The only way to truly grasp that Africa isn't one country, is to leave your desk and travel northwards; to interact with people in their home countries; to listen to the unique challenges, hopes and aspirations that guide their decisions.

As marketers looking north from SA, we also need to snap out of the 'Kodak model'. Pictures of shiny happy people holding your client's product, smiling away isn't going to persuade. We need to research the roles that brands, and products play in people's lives and in the popular culture of their countries.

Communicating **with** our target audiences, not **at** them, is pivotal. Ethnographic market research is critical. Commerce must meet culture before the right medium, message, narrative and channel can be identified.

As an example, Net#work BBDO recently ran a very effective campaign for Libresse, a range of feminine hygiene products, which was primarily structured around email messaging. From a marketing viewpoint email wasn't fashionable, but it was the right channel – feminine healthcare, is a taboo topic in South African culture – so email was the right channel to engage and educate confidentially.



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Our email campaign performed 20% higher than industry benchmarks, paid back R2,5m in earned media with a R45k investment and delivered 2% value share growth, moving Libresse from #5 to #4 in category. Success.

Technology is also an important tool to reach consumers at scale, quickly and can be a useful communication enabler but the bulk of Africa has limited tech infrastructure and using platforms like apps and innovations like VR and AR isn't necessarily the right route into African markets.

The solution needs to mold itself around people's lives and existing behaviours, not the other way round.

In closing, the BBDO Group understands the importance of understanding people, cultures and identifies the roles brands can play in their consumers' lives. They then come up with ideas to solve these problems and ensure they deploy local solutions to solve local problems, rather than trying implement South African (or European) solutions on the continent.

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