

What digital planning is not

A few days ago, I was chatting with a former colleague in San Francisco, California - he works the planning department of a prominent advertising agency in Lagos, and was vacationing in the US for the summer. Naturally, our gist had revolved around current events and trends in the Nigerian media and advertising industry, especially given the country's poor representation at the recently concluded 57th Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival.

By [Franklin Ozekhome](#) 14 Jul 2010



He revealed how his agency was still trying to come to terms with successfully integrating digital offerings their brand proposals to clients. Marketers were not buying these 'digital recommendations', and had told the agency to stick to what they knew best - strategic implementation that was focused on the utilisation of traditional media channels - TV, print, radio, and in-store media.

Impact of digital advertising

One client in particular, had explained their position was borne out of research they had conducted recently to gauge the impact of digital advertising on consumers, and that only a fraction of the target market in the research poll had reacted to online advertising. Fewer still had gone on to purchase a product or recommend it based on some digital influences.

I had probed further to understand what the issues were, and was shocked to find out that in this time and age of pro-sumers, conversations, engagement, social inter-activism, and digital ecosystems, some agencies and clients still don't get it. The blame went to the agency because they were supposed to act as change agents for marketers' consumers, and the industry, and yet, they were proffering outdated digital models, and exporting platforms and concepts that were not resonating with consumers in the Nigerian market.

They have to understand that in the industrialised world, and supposedly, digitally developed countries, agencies and marketers are still trying to cut their teeth in this space. The digital world is continually evolving and moving at a pace faster than we are at understanding digital natives [the internet generation that grew up surrounded by digital technologies].

What digital is not

- Digital is not about taking a big idea that was successful some place and localising the concept for other brands.
- Digital is not about packaging a cool concept wrapped up as product ideas to sell to clients (no smart

client will go for that nor will it have any meaningful impact for their brands).

- Digital is not about developing an online presence, Facebook campaign or Twitter app, and expecting consumers to love your brand because you have attempted to inhabit their space.
- Digital is not about websites, or developing cool slogans and images on moving media platforms.
- Digital is not about setting up a unit with planners, and calling them 'digital strategists', and expecting them to come up with 'digital ideas' for brands.

What then is digital? What does digital planning entail?

I do not claim to know all of the answers, as I am still understudying cultural insights, digital planning mode and brand engagement tools that have been used successfully on digital natives in the past five years. However, I know that digital should combine the following:

User insights, design thinking, entertainment, information architecture [IA], social chatter, content strategy, user experience [UX], mobile and data analytics, media and connections planning, and innovative use of offline channels

Simple put, digital planning is about platform ideas not channel tactics.

States Stefan Olander, global director of Brand Connections, Nike: "The digital world permeates consume lives, but they never think of it as technology - it's just another tool of convenience. So rather than viewing it as 'new media' and a vehicle to fire messages at the consumer, we use it to service a need. As we move from passive one-way communications to a two-way conversation, we give our consumer a voice by listening, sharing, and co-creating and, above all, by enabling meaningful solutions."

The whole idea of inter-activism and utilisation of digital media stems from the notion of offering real value and meaning to people's lives for a longer period of time by creating "tangible and real assets that transcends mediums to an engaging platform that people are eager to own" - Tom Himpe.

Check out the following case studies, and try to understand the mindset of the agencies that developed these award-winning concepts for their clients:

- Taxi - MINI
- R/GA - Nike+
- SS+K - MSNBC.com
- Tequila/Hong Kong - Levi's World
- Farfar - Diesel [Heidies]
- GT - Microsoft [Big Shadow]
- Kirt Gunn & Associates - Lincoln [Dreams]
- Crispin Porter + Bogusky - Burger King [Subservient Chicken]

From all of the above case studies (including works researched in the past year from agencies in Johannesburg, London, Paris, Miami, Hong Kong, Brussels and Sydney, Australia), and ongoing conversations had with some marketers (Nokia, VW, Charles Schwab, HP), I believe we have not yet scratched the surface. We are going about it wrongly, and we need the support of clients in the industry to make any headway.

If we are going to proffer brand engagement ideas and digital solutions as a basis for achieving set

objectives, agencies have to work in tandem with clients, content providers, trendspotters, marketing technologists, and social media curators to create original, integrated concepts that reflect their total understanding of the business segment, and the consumers they are trying to make a connection with.

Next on digital

Allow me to end on this note by quoting Steve Rubel of Edelman Digital: "The next great media company won't have a website; it will be all spokes and no hub. It will exist as a constellation of connected apps and widgets that live inside other sites and offer a full experience plus access to your social graph and robust community features."

ABOUT FRANKLIN OZEKHOME

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