

Understand what your audience wants

 By [Louise Marsland](#)

7 Nov 2016

Media today is more about a conversation with your audience or readers, instead of a one-way communication, emphasises Lerina Bierman, managing director of Carat Cape Town media agency.



Image by 123RF

“The definition of media hasn’t really changed: it is still mass communication, broadcast, publishing, internet, traditional media, as we see it. What has changed is that everyone can now publish. The competition is a lot bigger. We always thought about traditional channels as competition, but that competition now includes everyone with a Facebook and Twitter account.”

Bierman says traditional media need to adapt to new channels and have a conversation with their consumers. “What we are seeing is that many traditional media owners are now offering multi-platform solutions. Media owners realise that they need to embrace new technology and sell it to us as a broader, more holistic offering, playing in a new appealing space, rather as staid old media.”

By way of example, she highlighted the Cannes-award winning *New York Times* rich content activation with the Google VR viewers showing a short film, ‘[The Displaced](#)’, about children uprooted by war. It brought virtual reality mainstream for traditional media. Another big winner at Cannes was the ‘Field trip to Mars’ experience by agency [McCann New York](#) for client Lockheed Martin.

“The scope of what media is, is a lot broader, with more options. But we don’t need a new definition for media, we need a new approach. We are playing in a far broader playing field right now, with more eco-systems that play out across multi-platforms, touch points, conversations. We are trying to drive earned media through conversations too. There is now a far more intricate set of touch points and we now need to create a story around that.”

Follow your consumer

Bierman says that the reality is that media in its traditional format is dying. “Not print or television per say, but traditional long form media is dying in the way it used to be. Even regular television that you put out according to a programming schedule is dying out at the top end.”

As regards the health of the media industry in South Africa and Africa, a large portion of the market does not have the luxury of options, so traditional media is experiencing success and is not in dire straits – yet, says Bierman.

“Where the media industry needs to grow and change is in the top end space. We see DStv and TML starting to do this well. They are looking at how consumers are doing things, consumers want things on demand. DStv has more on-demand platforms, and are continuing to grow on-demand platforms, otherwise they will become completely irrelevant,” adds Bierman, referring to increasing consumer demand for video-on-demand (VoD).

What is crucial for all media, is to watch what their audiences want and are doing and adapt to that, she says. Particularly the new generation. “They don’t want to wait for anything. For print, consumers want to see things in short format, disposable nuggets of info. All the answers lie with our consumers. The trend is towards Snapchat right now. What is it about Snapchat? Learn from that. Give them content in that same format.

“If you don’t start adapting now, you will die. It is all about on-demand. About having different platforms and extending what you have on television, for example, into other channels.”

Bierman references Comedy Central which also places extended programming on YouTube, in addition to its television programming.

Of course, the cost of data and bandwidth means that on-demand is not as much of a threat in South Africa and Africa, as people don’t have the option. But companies are also coming up with innovative ways to bring the internet to the mass market, so this is a matter of time (think Google balloon project, Facebook satellites).

“When costs come down for data, changes will occur more rapidly,” Bierman reiterates.

Media under pressure

Print has been threatened by online media for the past decade and now it is the turn of the television industry with on-demand TV and YouTube reality show trends. What television broadcasters need to do is adapt to the two-way conversation, says Bierman, where viewers and consumer engagement is brought into the show, like they do on *Idols* and other reality shows.

“TV broadcasters need to create these shows, curate and expand the content onto YouTube, with behind the scenes interviews, extra clips... It is about creating more than what is on the TV, becoming a multi-platform brand, that you are not just providing a one-way conversation. People want to have a conversation, create Twitter hashtags, creating those additional platforms and vehicles to talk about the shows – that is where broadcasters need to adapt to. Creating earned media, hype around a show.

“Unlocking that earned media space is where the real value sits. Telling a millennial to buy something doesn’t mean as much to them as their friends telling them about it. That advocacy is where the value of social media lies.”

It is actually really simple, says Bierman. No one knows what the future holds, so follow what your consumers want and adapt your platforms to them and you'll be fine.

The digital age

We are heading into new territory that new technologies such as augmented or virtual reality bring. "It is important to bring it into our media plans, but in the context of our client's market. At the same time, in South Africa, this is a really small part of the consumer market that has these technologies available to them. Certain kinds of brands, innovative top-end brands can play in this space and get the right consumer engagement, but for us to get to critical mass in AR, etc., will take some time," Bierman reiterates.

One of the trends for the future, she says, will be more partnerships between technology companies and agencies and the media. "New media platforms and models will be the new status quo. We will be adapting to new trends and finding new models. The answer is always with the consumer – how they behave, what they want in the future."

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

Louise Burgers (previously Marsland) is Founder/Content Director: SOURCE Content Marketing Agency. Louise is a Writer, Publisher, Editor, Content Strategist, Content/Media Trainer. She has written about consumer trends, brands, branding, media, marketing and the advertising communications industry in SA and across Africa, for over 20 years, notably, as previous Africa Editor: Bizcommunity.com; Editor: Bizcommunity Media/Marketing SA; Editor-in-Chief: AdVantage magazine; Editor: Marketing Mx magazine; Editor: Progressive Retailing magazine; Editor: BusinessBrief magazine; Editor: FMOG Files newsletter. Web: www.sourceagency.co.za.

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