

How brands can reach black consumers

 By [Peter du Toit](#)

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Advertising and marketing strategies in South Africa are more often than not pitched to an imagined black consumer: homogenous, newly-moneyed, and still baffled by what to buy as well as in desperate need of a funeral policy.

This is, of course, completely incorrect. It's also hugely insulting.

It's high time that retail, financial and well, every other kind of brand, started to treat black consumers in this country with respect.

Why?

There is simply no greater prize in our economy than the black consumer. The numbers are as simple as they are compelling.

The black middle class has swelled incredibly - according to a report released by Goldman Sachs in 2013, the size of South Africa's black middle class (deemed to be people earning between R1,400 and R10,000 a month at 2008 prices) had doubled from 1993 to 2008, from 3.1-million to 5.4-million people.

The upward trend continues, not only in numbers but in buying power as well. According to another 2013 research study released by the UCT Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing, the black middle class commanded R400bn in spending power, while the white middle class had R320bn.



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And yet still every time a black middle class consumer switches on the TV or goes online they're targeted with adverts for the aforementioned funeral policy or see clown-like representations of themselves dancing for joy when buying airtime or fast food and speaking in some kind of deliriously exaggerated 'black voice'.

The numbers all tell the same story. It is sound business practice to be able to reach black consumers, and failure to do so is costly. The increasing availability of data-enabled mobile phones all over the world has ushered in the age of the consumer: the best consumer brands are mining huge amounts of data from social networks in order to deliver more personalised, curated content. Hyper-personalisation is this season's catch-phrase. So the fact that so many big name brands in South Africa are struggling to understand such a big market is even more bizarre.

What qualifies me to sound off on this topic is an 18-year track record talking to black consumers every day.

I launched *Soccer Laduma* newspaper in 1997, and have always believed that we needed to nurture a relationship between us and our readers by listening to and understanding them. Our aim was to provide content that enriched the lives of the people reading it - so understanding them and how we could fit in their lives was important. Today, the rewards are plain to see: Soccer Laduma is the world's largest football-only newspaper, circulates 328,000 copies every week and is read by about 3.2 million people (ABC 2014). We reach roughly 23% of black males in the country. The *Soccer Laduma* Supporters Club launched only in August 2014 has 24,000 members across the country and continues to grow at break-neck speed.

Our readers have taught us that all consumers know exactly what they want, and once you share a common language, you start to have meaningful conversations. The conversations we have with our audience daily via the Supporters Club and online transcend soccer and cover literally everything from how to afford school fees to what the most popular breakfast cereals are and why.

When consumers see you respond to their needs and concerns, then you can start to build trust. It wasn't enough for us to share a common passion with our readers - we had to be receptive to what they were asking for in order to build that relationship.

Reaching black consumers wasn't complicated for us - we listened, we responded, we listened again and responded. Brands that want to build relationships with black consumers need to be prepared to find them where they are, learn to understand them and take them seriously.

Far too many brands in South Africa are not doing this, and are losing huge opportunities. They are not getting the valuable insights that we are getting because they are not listening. If yours is one of those brands, you're losing out.

ABOUT PETER DU TOIT

Peter du Toit is the founder and CEO of Soccer Laduma, the second biggest-selling newspaper in South Africa, and one of the world's top five best-selling football newspapers. Soccer Laduma is also the sixth biggest mobile site in South Africa.

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