

# Can the real marketers stand up?

 By [Mfundo Ntsibande](#)

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On a daily basis I interact with marketing and branding professionals, and I can't help but notice the lack of deterioration of the profession through some of our colleagues, who have turned marketing into a boring discipline.

The entry to the profession is so low that agencies compete with housewives who have landed a promotional branding tender, it's far more fashionable to have an events or production company nowadays.

## Responsible for the brand

I usually hear people say "marketing is not a science", true that may be but in my opinion it is still an art. Marketing is the engine that brings any brand to life, drives sales and measurable ROI. Without it an organisation will be left crippled.

Be that as it may, a marketing/brand manager is a custodian of a brand and with the task of elevating the brand to the next level. It is not only a privilege but an honour to be responsible for the blueprint, strategy, positioning, innovation and growth of a particular brand.

The frustration is when you meet marketing/brand managers who do not understand their customers, brand positioning and lack of passion for the profession.

I come from a school of thought where marketers were living their brands' ethos, winning creative awards and driving up revenue. The likes of Thebe Ikalafeng in his days at Nike, Happy Ntshingila (Herdbouys), Reg Lascaris (TBWA), and Mark Jenkins (SABC) just to name a few, were passionate, competitive and aggressive marketing professionals.

The same level of passion is not easily found anymore, marketing/brand managers have become administration managers, spending more time with paperwork at boardrooms and less time with customers, trade and creative agencies.

## Excuse after excuse

Here are some common excuses for mediocre brand campaigns:

1) We don't have big marketing budgets like before: You don't need a huge marketing budget to make your brand come alive, we are living in a technological era, find ways to be more innovative and creative. Trade exchanges and barter deals are nothing new and if used strategically can do wonders for your brand. Brand association can leverage on brand image and awareness.

2) The agency came up with the campaign: We can no longer blame agencies for bad advertising, particularly the FMCG sector where we still see washing powder ads that are meaningless and tasteless, it's your brand, make sure whoever works on it understands your target market. The consumer can no longer be taken for granted, when an ad does not speak to them they won't pay attention.

3) Turnaround time is too long: I suggest you get out of the mentality of big agencies and start using smaller agencies that are hungry for work and have a point to prove. They are more flexible and can also bring new ideas to the table.

4) We don't need Above the Line campaigns; we are already a media platform: I have heard this excuse far too many times from media owners who don't see the need to spend money on marketing; they would rather partner on Jazz events and call that raising brand awareness.

When last did you see a newspaper brand campaign? Some TV brands only advertise within their platforms but wonder why they can't increase viewership. Some media brands have not re-launched or revived their brand positioning in over 10 years

## **Creative and innovative**

The point is as marketers we have forgotten the reasons why we are a special breed of people. Our aim is to be creative, innovative and offer simple solutions to a complex business environment.

We have become too comfortable in fancy offices, big salaries and attending Durban Julys of this world and have forgotten our calling.

Launching or repositioning a brand campaign is one of the greatest things you will ever get to do as marketers; it will be the highlight of your career portfolio. If you miss that opportunity someone will do it for you.

A marketing director once said "a marketing/brand manager should not stay with one brand for over three years because they will run out of innovation", familiarity breeds complacency.

Let's bring sexy back to the marketing and branding profession, and can the real marketers stand up.

## **ABOUT MFUNDO NTSIBANDE**

Mfundo Ntsibande is marketing professional with over 16 years career of building brands, with a maverick approach to brand thinking. A thought-leader with a background in media and broadcasting (TV, Radio, Print), Advertising and entrepreneurship. A winner of Promaxbda Gold Award.

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