

Rate of social, technology change leaves marketing behind

 By [Diane Charton](#)

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South African marketing and communications professionals need to step up the pace at which they integrate new technologies and social trends into their strategies, or risk falling behind the needs and expectations of the consumers they are seeking to address.

We're working in an environment of constant and rapid change, and consumers are adapting to new trends and technologies at a faster rate than most marketers.

Understanding consumers

The risk for the industry is that we could fall behind the needs of our customers and become less relevant to them. It is crucial for marketers to become quick and agile in their thinking if they're to keep up with today's consumer.

One challenge that marketers face lies in understanding how consumers are using new technologies and channels in their every day lives. A large proportion of businesses were surprised by how quickly their customers started using the Internet to search for information and make purchases; now, many are battling to understand how consumers make use of smartphones and social media.

The consumer landscape has shifted enormously. Today's consumer makes purchasing decisions drawing information from a tapestry of media and channels, from search engines and online reviews, to TV, store visits and interactions with friends and family in real life and through social media. Many marketers are still struggling to grasp how the interplay of these fragmented channels shapes how customers are making buying choices.

Using the right channels

What's more, channels such as streaming video and IP TV are threatening to disrupt the market even further. What does it mean for our businesses if a large portion of the youth use their smartphones and tablets to consume media rather than print and TV, for example? Are we using the right channels to reach them? In addition, we are seeing massive social and demographics changes around the world.

Many marketers in developed countries are struggling to grasp what trends such as ageing populations, youth unemployment, the new values of Millennials, and large-scale immigration mean for them.

Marketing skills

Closer to home, South African society, too, is changing as a result of the rise of the black middle-class, a growing awareness of social inequalities, and globalisation. This, too, demands new skills from marketers who must become better at catering for diversity in their strategies to cater for different demographics, languages, levels of access to technology, and living standards.

The problem, however, is that the marketing industry is so competitive that few marketing professionals or agencies feel they have time to spare for training and reskilling. And this is a major problem since marketing skills are so essential to the success of businesses.

But marketing professionals must embrace lifelong learning and invest time in understanding new trends if they are to deliver strategies that speak to customers in the right channels, at the right times, and with the right messaging.

ABOUT DIANE CHARTON

As managing director of Red & Yellow, Diane Charton steers the strategic direction of the business. She strives to empower and educate the SA marketing communications industry through a myriad of traditional and digital educational platforms. With a unique combination of marketing, leadership and engineering experience, Charton brings a multifaceted approach to using marketing trends and insights to innovate and empower the industry as a whole. Follow @DCharton on Twitter.

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