

The rise of 'me'

 By [Gaby de Abreu](#)

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"Quality is now associated with things that are handmade."

In brand communication, 'knowing your target market' will cease to be about drawing an average every man in outline, but will rather be about speaking to every individual customer who comes into contact with your products. It's mindboggling.

The customer has become king like never before. In the past, this used to mean that when things went wrong, shop assistants had to offer sympathy and solutions. In 2015, this will mean that every customer's wildest whim will have to be satisfied - individually.

There has been a big shift in the way that consumers consume. In the past, big brands with big marketing budgets and corporate clout offered a degree of gravitas that consumers associated with quality. The hipster, organic, bespoke crowd have pushed back against this in recent years, and quality is now associated with things that are handmade, to order, from small companies.



Mathias Rosenthal via [123RF](#)

It took a while for big corporates to catch up, but catch up they have, and now they're throwing their big budgets at providing the kinds of individualised experiences that consumers crave. We've all watched as Coca-Cola released bottles and cans with people's names on them onto the market. We lapped up the campaign, searching for our own names emblazoned in red and white on a can. Now Coca-Cola Israel has taken it a step further, allowing Diet Coke drinkers to design one of two million bottles for production.

This customer engagement and involvement in the process creates a great bridge between big brands and their individual users. This is a trend that will gain momentum in 2015. We already see big South African retailers packaging their mass-produced products in brown paper and string to create the illusion of deli shopping. And Magnum stores now allow customers to create their own version of a global ice-cream product.

Big data

Another tool that the corporate giant has in his hands as he quests to individualise his customer experience is the ability to analyse big data. The ability to gain insight from the mass of data that customers generate every day, in real-time, means that brands can start responding to consumer needs on an individual level, almost at the moment that they are imagined. We are years away from that yet, but big data is already helping corporates to deliver individualised services.

Consumers are even demanding individualised associations with the places in which they live. They don't want their city to offer the same global services and attractions as every other city, but would rather be proud of the specifics and idiosyncrasies. Vancouver and Melbourne have launched campaigns to announce their brands, quantify what they stand for and make their residents proud and their non-residents wishful.

All this presents a challenge for brand communications specialists. We have to tailor mass production to the individual. We can't just understand our target audience, broadly speaking, but have to try to find ways of speaking directly to every individual that makes up that audience. It's a daunting task, and one that requires us to be experts not only in branding, design and copywriting, but also in the media, social sciences and psychology to solve problems in a global market of products and ideas.

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