

Connecting better with consumers

 By [Zumi Njongwe](#)

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What makes great purpose really hit home is that it is anchored in time; always looking to the future while remaining custodians of the present. It's good for the people whose lives we touch, and it's good for business, too.



Image supplied: Zumi Njongwe, consumer communication and marketing excellence director at Nestlé

To continuously connect with people meaningfully requires us, the business, agency partners, researchers, and specialists, to meditate on purpose while doing the work of understanding market behaviour.

For instance, our portfolio at Nestlé is an ecosystem best captured in the journey of food from farm to table, and we are obsessed with telling that story as it speaks to value, quality, sustainability, community partnership, and so on.

To do that well – to communicate any purpose and how it comes to life - the secret sauce is in sharpening the insights that echo people's mind and heart states. Having been doing this line of work for several decades, I've learnt some things worth sharing:

Foresight is a game changer

Brands need to spend more resources on foresight, versus hindsight. As data integration evolves how we synthesise data, brands can truly look ahead, beyond traditional forms of research and data mining for that foresight.

This means spending more resources on foresight, tapping into bespoke data sources beyond the traditional, and using predictive analytics to understand consumers better. If hindsight was 20/20 for the last number of decades, then in the new decades, thanks to technology, foresight will be 20/20. We simply need to - and will be - investing more in this shift.

Integrate for better brand experiences and sales

We are learning every day how to combine our understanding of trends, business, channel and experience ecosystems, to connect with consumers seamlessly from brand love to usage, to advocacy.

This has been fueled by strong analytics and furthered by the convergence of these analytics with agile, restless focus on great execution. In the backend, integration speaks to a stronger hand in reporting, with ease in standardisation across the board, for various units in the business.

The magic of this is the clarity it provides insights to teams, giving them more room to become closer business partners to brands, and sharpening our curiosity to continue delivering better experiences and sales.

Business acumen at the core

Insights teams need to have 'whole brain' thinking to understand logic and creativity, quantitative and qualitative, feeling and logic. This means being open to different experiences, for a wider breadth of understanding of the full business.

The result is an acuity that drives a fundamental understanding (and commitment) to an end-to-end value chain model, and along with it will be material concerns such as sourcing strategies, sustainability, etc.

When insight teams have this level of business acumen, they can think through the macroeconomic dynamics critical in driving the national agenda of our country where business must play a pivotal role in improving livelihoods.

Experimentation is key

Evolving business models need a point of view that sees possibilities as infinite, an approach centred on disruption in both thinking about and activating opportunities.

To do this well, brands need to free up budgets for experimentation in resolving key business and societal challenges. From openness to experimentation, we can evolve our businesses beyond what we even imagined.

Think about how banks are now going into telcos, telcos are becoming bankers, retailers have courier services and taxis are now media channels. No one is staying in their lane. So similarly, in FMCG, we are evolving to create experiences beyond the core brand building, hence personalization is a critical lever to pull.

Execute in real time

Being in a 'post-Covid' moment and coming out of a collective survival mind state, consumers are hungry to live and experience life now!

They are impatient for this in-the-moment experience to be fulfilling. At the heart of this is faster, agile insights, as close as possible to real-time, to help us make faster decisions about where, how and when to invest quickly.

We will see more brands doing active testing in the moment and with the integration of data, this is very possible and beats waiting for six weeks to get results. We are getting closer to precision marketing, with clear KPIs to test, learn and iterate in real-time – that there is a future of consumer insights – I will bet my bottom Rand on it.

ABOUT ZUMI NJONGWE

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