

Women in marketing: The new specialist generalists?

 By Sheila McGillivray

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During Women's Month I've been discussing how much women in marketing need to know to be employable in the current job arena. The consensus is that it's not enough for young women to focus on a specialised marketing career; we now need to be "specialist generalists," and know an awful lot about a lot.



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Business Believes in Unicorns

I read Jessica Edgson's [article](#), *Hey Agencies, Stop Trying to Hire Unicorns*, with interest, knowing how demanding even mid-level job requirements are. A business looking for a social media manager, for example, asks that the candidate has a bachelor's degree in marketing (or similar) three or more years' experience, be a writer and proficient in CMR software etc, etc, the list goes on.

Do We Really Need A Degree?

Not only do we need to be unicorns, we also need a degree. The question is: why are employers in social media marketing, for example, still asking for a tertiary qualification, especially in South Africa where so few can afford university? Surely in such a rapidly changing field it would make sense to hire youth and passion over three or four years of university, plus the three or four years experience required? A university degree would also imply specialisation in the communications field, and yet the specs of a marketing job now demand a wealth of "specialist generalist" knowledge too.

Warp Speed Marketing Changes

FastCompany's *Top Jobs in 2025* [article](#) predicts that people with the ability to focus on “computational thinking”, that is, process massive amounts of data and spot patterns, will be highly valued. It also goes on to say “we need to be learning new things” and the lifelong learning trend will happen through “mini bite-sized chunks of information” that can make you knowledgeable about anything in the minimum amount of time (but not a specialist).

Necessary Addiction

Influencer, Seth Godin recently wrote about how we: “Get addicted to the rush at work, or to the endless flow of the online world, and your life changes. Attention spans go down, patience decreases, essential tasks are left undone, and most of all, our humanity starts to fade away.” While I wholeheartedly agree with him, the point here is that the addiction to work, change, learning seems to be necessary for us to remain relevant in the workplace.

The Invisible Workload

Women's “invisible workload” is nicely summarised in [Time.com](#) – but suffice to say we remember the coffee pods and the toilet paper, and so much more. While Thomas Huxley's quote “Try to learn something about everything and everything about something” is becoming truer; I still hire the best, most specialised person for the job and it's served me very well.

ABOUT SHEILA MCGILLIVRAY

Sheila McGillivray's knowledge of the advertising industry spans four decades. Sheila's energy, enthusiasm and passion for her work has grown with every new position and challenge. Her experience in the industry is exceeded only by her willingness to keep learning and innovating.

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