

OMG moment: Taking note of Africa's mobile media movement

 By Leigh Andrews

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TEAMtalk Media, MobiMedia, AddSuite, LoveDigital and Honeykome are all making waves in the African marketing industry. But did you know they're all part of the same umbrella company, Ole! Media Group, or OMG? CMO Deseré Orrill tells us more...



Desere Orrill

Deseré Orrill, CMO of Ole! Media Group, [spoke at the final session of AfricApps at the AfricaCom conference](#) late last year as MD of MobiMedia. Her presentation on 'Darwinian thinking, dumb phone majority and finding that marketing sweet spot' was so insightful that I arranged to chat with her the next day, face-to-face.

"As an African digital media business, we think it's important to reach our audiences via the channels that they prefer to utilise," explained Orrill. Many digital agencies focus on creating solutions that address the high end of the market only, with an emphasis, for example, on iPhone or Android apps that "chew data by the bucket load". In SA, with smartphone penetration currently at around 30% - 35% and at around 15% in Africa as a whole, campaigns that run on channels like these would address only a small portion of the market.

So, to ensure the broadest reach, Orrill explains that their approach to digital marketing is "inclusive rather than exclusive", and that they provide digital solutions across the full range of channels, from the most basic to the most sophisticated, ensuring a service that's optimised for the bulk of the continent. So while any of OMG's campaigns is guaranteed to focus on its target market and the best digital way to reach them, they also have an in-house content team that can tailor a message to the correct tone of voice to match the client and the consumer's expectation.

Revealed: How much work is involved when OMG is briefed to "Just write something"

Orrill says this content optimisation means when her team is briefed to 'write something', they have very specific guidelines. For example, writing a short 300-word feature for web doesn't end at that. It also needs a 100-word version for responsive mobi sites, a 60-worder for feature phones, a 160-character SMS headline, and a 140-character version for a tweet or USSD version of the message. In doing so, the team is able to cater to every digital communication requirement.



We then spoke about the 'Africa as a country' conundrum, which often needs a multilingual approach, so simply writing in English and translating the message into other languages won't do the trick. OMG meets this by having content produced by a network of journalists they have on the ground in other countries to write not just in different languages, but also in a way that best matches each market's flavour.

How mobile and Africa meet...

In some ways, South Africa mimics the American or even the European digital media consumption patterns and model, based on devices out there, content preferences and areas of interest, but it's important to have a parallel approach in marketing that caters to the smart phone/feature phone divide. Orrill is also seeing changes in Nigeria, which she described as the "New York of Africa" based on the chaos in the streets and a certain vibrancy. She says there's so much talk of the

corruption in the country that this often overshadows the dynamism, which is what powers this many-layered economy. By comparison, Orrill finds Kenya and Ghana are more structured in the way they do business.

Looking ahead then, there's a huge amount of interest in mobile on the continent, which will continue to grow as it's nowhere near saturation yet. Optimistically, Orrill hopes to see more flexibility from the mobile network operators or MNOs in the months ahead. Extending the topic, Orrill also sees that increased access to handsets and devices holds great potential for the 'democratisation of digital', marking the importance of the smartphone on the continent.

Increased penetration of smartphones makes it an easy-access route for mobile advertising, says Orrill, especially through the likes of Facebook, Mxit, 2Go and WeChat. People are already hooked into these services and are relatively comfortable on social, chat and instant messaging services, making it a relatively easy entry point for digital advertisers to target these audiences. However, smartphones are not the be all and end all, as advertisers can also reach mobile consumers through USSD, SMS and feature phones - still the majority of the main African market - it's just the message that differs, in this case.



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But what exactly falls under the Ole! Media Group umbrella?

In terms of what to expect next at OMG, Orrill spoke of big developments that include expanding their content creation hub to include video production, growing their own stable of digital publishing brands and services, increasing capabilities in digital ad serving and premium sales, as well as adding to their teams in both Johannesburg and Cape Town and making new additions to their pedigree of clients, which already includes the likes of Microsoft, Bonitas, Supersport, SARU, the PSL, Pioneer Foods, Novartis, MTN, Vodacom and Cell C, to mention a few.

Orrill then took me through the basics of OMG. The company started in 2009 as MobiMedia, a mobile agency based in Johannesburg - hence the mobile first' approach is the cornerstone of the group. Through their relationship with [TEAMtalk Media](#), a client at the time, in what Orrill calls 'an odd twist of fate that's a sign of these digital times', the smaller company MobiMedia bought the bigger company TEAMtalk in 2013 and laid the foundations for OMG. Within a short space of time, the organisation had grown from 10 to 60 and as of late-2014, employs just over 100 personnel.

The growth in staff numbers mirrors the increase in the number of companies that the group covers and the service offering it's able to provide. An important part of the digital mix is the monetisation of the offering. AddSuite is OMG's fastest growing subsidiary, incorporating real-time bidding, programmatic buying and now, with the recent acquisition of Mason Media, premium sales and boutique publisher sites, AddSuite is able to make commercial sense to publishers and advertisers alike. AddSuite is also one of two local Google DFP partners, marking an exceptional year of growth for the organisation as a whole.

At Ole! Media Group, it's all based on a policy of providing a framework where talented people can thrive. That's why it's a natural home for the companies it has acquired, including agencies like Full-Circle Online, LoveDigital, or Mason Media, which tend to have great vitality to start with but insufficient corporate structures or the finances to grow. Orrill says many

corporates that merge or acquire organisations often end up eliminating the very essence of what made them want to acquire the companies in the first place. OMG's model allows for the entrepreneurial spirit to flourish and provides its companies with the big picture infrastructure and support they require, essentially becoming a network filled with a cross-pollination of clients.

Don't forget that digital ties it all together...

As a natural progression, and to meet clients' requirements beyond mobile marketing channels, OMG established a full-service digital agency in 2014, called [HoneyKome](#) - spelt as such as the URL for the traditional way was already taken and "Ks and hashtags are always cool in company names". The agency focuses on strategy and engagement models using mobile, web and social channels - essentially anything that touches digital. Orrill explains: "you can't just draw a line between traditional and digital these days - and by including opportunities for digital interaction, an immediate call-to-action response mechanism is created and marketing communication is spread along the digital highways where the consumer is cruising today".

"Often, people come to us with their finalised marketing plan and say 'do some digital'," she laughs. It's a pity there is not a greater understanding of how each channel can weave together to create even greater opportunities for brands, but Orrill says we are seeing a shift in what is sometimes a limited or closed mindset and OMG encourages its clients to integrate digital into all aspects of their marketing from the ground up and to embrace the bigger picture. Helping this along is the fact that although retaining separate identities and operating independently, each of the companies under the OMG umbrella is also inter-dependent, working together to create overarching digital solutions that deliver results.

Quite a mouthful, but take the time to digest as it's positively sparking with positivity about the future of digital on the continent. To find out more about Ole! Media Group, [click here](#) or [follow their Twitter feed](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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