

The market is vulnerable; raise your EQ

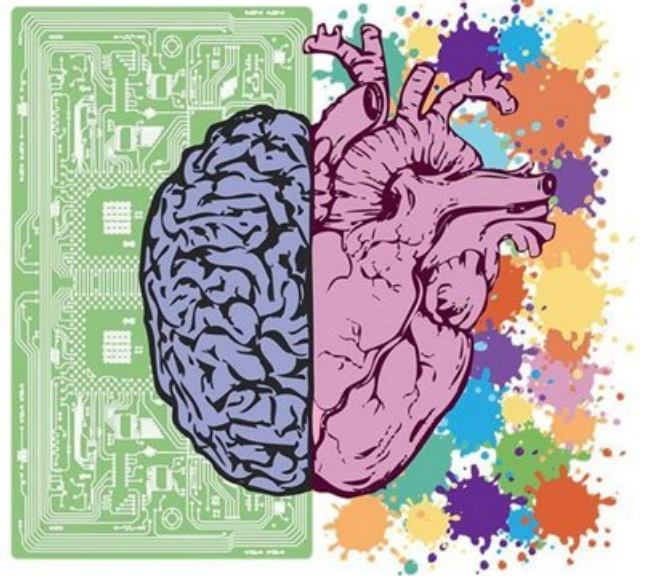
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The marketing and communications landscape has had to build on its EQ (emotional intelligence) during the Covid-19 pandemic as individual priorities the world over shifted. In the face of job and financial insecurity, life-threatening health risks, social distancing and possible isolation, the majority of people began to feel exposed and vulnerable.

Naturally, the consequence of this fear-driven survival mode is an intolerance for brand communications and marketing that lacks relevance, empathy and compassion. Pre-Covid, brands understood that marketing communications had to resonate and offer value to engage meaningfully with their consumers. And when the pandemic stormed the globe, many brands tried unconvincingly to reassure their customers that their brand was 'there to help' and create a sense of connection by suggesting that 'they're all in this together'.

Covid-19 has brought the age of transparency to light, exposing greedy and insincere brands that forget about the value of relationships, and instead focus on the sales. As a result, consumers are shutting out the brands that don't address their pain points with authentic solutions that really and truly help make a positive difference.



Apart from the tone in which brands communicate, they need to connect with compassion and demonstrate their care for their consumers and the context in which they're 'surviving'. This is where some companies fall short and come off completely tone deaf. A recent example is a backlash and criticism for some brands attempting to leverage Women's Day this year. Some campaigns revealed brands that lacked empathy by not respectfully acknowledging and addressing the severity of the current state of affairs regarding gender inequality and gender-based violence, which has been highlighted as South Africa's second greatest pandemic.

One glaringly obvious consequence of Covid-19's lockdown restrictions is that of relationships; those with family, friends, co-workers and customers. The Covid-19 experience has for many, placed greater value on these relationships, and it's an insight brand communicators will do well to remember. The sweat equity for brands to connect and secure a sale is much higher these days. It will be built from establishing trust through empathy, offering authentic value and making people feel less vulnerable.

Mimi Nicklin, the host of the *Empathy for Breakfast* show, was recently quoted saying: "Empathy is the secret path to deeply resonant and powerful campaigns, and it is a skill that the best communicators and content creators around the world instinctively deliver in every project." Empathetic communications draws on the brain and heart to connect with compassion.

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