

The golden needle of relevance in the unprecedented age of personal brand endorsement

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"Never before have we seen such a personal endorsement of brands by our consumers. The issue of relevance becomes the golden needle that knits everything together." So says Xolisa Dyeshana, group creative director at ad agency Joe Public, and this year's co-host of the 2022 Nedbank Integrated Marketing Conference (IMC). In 2021, AdWeek named Xolisa as one of 15 creative leaders from all over the world who are reshaping the advertising industry.



Xolisa Dyeshana, group creative director, Joe Public

No stranger to the notion of relevance, which is the theme of this year's Nedbank IMC being held on 29 July 2022, Xolisa unpacks and interrogates relevance in the following Q&A:

When you hear the words “marketing relevance, unpacked and interrogated”, what springs to mind?

For me, it's the importance of creating work that resonates with people. I think one of the biggest challenges for brands right now is to keep an ear to the ground; to be mindful of what is happening around us; and to acknowledge the realities of our audiences. We, as brands, advertisers and marketers, must be highly observant. It is markedly different from the time when brands could just talk at people. We need to talk with people and engage with them now. This is something that most marketers and advertisers grapple with.

Is it harder today to be relevant?

Not only do I think it's harder, but it's also more important than ever. The volume of communication and entertainment that consumers can choose from makes it extremely challenging to grasp their attention. We have to create communication that will make them want to consume our messages. But therein also lies an opportunity, because for the first time there is a feedback loop in real time. And if we get it right, that's when we become part of conversations. That's when we become part

of culture.

How can we get this right; how can we be all things to all people?

Consumers today are more vocal than ever. It's important for brands to ensure that we're not offending people in terms of fundamental things within the society that we exist. But I think there is also a danger in trying to be all things to all people. By chasing that, we can end up creating such bland work that we become nothing to anyone. Brands still need to take a view. But they also need to understand what the lay of the land is, what the relevant conversations are, and how all this aligns with the brand's purpose and what it stands for.

In the current milieu of social media, real-time feedback loops and the well-documented decline of brand loyalty, do you think that consumers have changed?

This is interesting, because while the consumer has changed in terms of behaviour, I would argue that they fundamentally remain the same. What has changed, is the world around us. We've reached a place where we are spoilt for choice and empowerment. And, in the context of relevance, this has the potential to create absolute gold – because we have people advocating for the brands that are relevant to them. Never before have we seen such a personal endorsement of brands.

Does this change how we measure our marketing efforts?

Certainly. We used to put out communication and our metrics were pretty much based on the amount of people that saw or heard our communication. Today, the consumer levels of engagement are not fully accounted for in our metrics, and that's something that we need to look at. Our metrics were designed to look at the exposure of a piece of communication on a certain timeline, but we don't necessarily measure the activities associated with that communication. For example, someone may watch an advert on social media from beginning to end, and then comment on it, share it and engage with it. Our measurements and metrics need to consider the nuanced difference between all of these different forms of engagement.

A final thought on relevance?

Being relevant has become the golden needle that knits together what is going on in consumers' lives. It's about how we create our brand with them in mind and how we connect that with what it stands for. Without this golden needle, we will lose our stand – in the minds and hearts of people, and ultimately in the market.

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In 2021 a total of 1 300 delegates from 14 countries around the world watched the live virtual conference. Since its launch in 2019, the Nedbank IMC has become known for its no sales pitch, one stream, one-day format and galaxy of renowned and specialist speakers.

Importantly, the conference is committed to presenting the business case for marketing, driven through the determination to secure marketing's seat at the boardroom table.

The Nedbank IMC is presented in association with the Marketing Association of South Africa (MASA), with chartered marketers receiving Continuous Professional Development Points (CPD) for attending.

The conference is endorsed by the Interactive Advertising Bureau of South Africa.

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