

Mike Sharman - From earned virality to purposeful purpose



By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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The first of our exclusive #BizTrends2024 interviews is with Retroviral founder and chief creative officer, Mike Sharman.

In this interview, Sharman chats to *Bizcommunity* Marketing & Media editor, Danette Breitenbach on the trends he sees will be relevant in 2024, from earned virality to purposeful purpose.

Bizcommunity · #BizTrends2024: Mike Sharman

The interview is also available via downloadable [App](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#) and [IONO.FM](#).

Earned media a massive driver

For Sharman earned media is a massive driver to create the talkability that ultimately rationally drives sales, and everything the agency does starts with the notion that virality is earned.

He explains that they are not just in the business of entertainment and awareness; they are in the business of commercial transactions.

“For me, if the idea is remarkable enough to make it onto the news, then we're onto something that is potentially viral, award-winning, and emotionally moving,” he explains.

“Ultimately, our job is to create remarkable content that really generates an emotional connection with an audience that drives the potential to create a sale, a download, some form of action,” explains Sharman.

For him, content needs to be able to live outside of the social realm, and not just exist in a 15 seconds of fame kind of headspace.

Funny, he says, is not enough for news journalists. “By adding in the facts, a campaign can draw news journalists. Content is the hook, but by bringing in the facts, it becomes newsworthy.”

And that's what leads to the generation of these earned media opportunities.”



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Interconnected marketing

What really fascinates Sharman is interconnected marketing and he believes there is an opportunity that exists in the various platforms within an ecosystem, and how all of these different platforms talk to each other and connect.

“Whether you are running your always-on social content on platforms like Facebook or Instagram, or even a peripheral space within TikTok, how do these things interconnect? How does your brand show up, and how does it differ within these spaces?”

“ *We coexist in various versions of metaverses at one single time and we have the opportunity to exist within different spaces and realms concurrently* ”

Is the golden thread still relevant?

In this interview, Sharman asks whether it is necessary to worry about single-minded concepts anymore and if we should still be talking about a golden thread to connect throughout the year on a brand's touchpoints.

This is especially true as today's consumers exist in a multiverse of metaverses made up of social channels, gamification spaces, and the real world, etc.

“These are all just various versions of metaverses that we coexist in at one single time and we have the opportunity to exist within different spaces and realms concurrently,” he says.

“From their job to their personal life to the content they're streaming, to the social channels they're existing in, or even in gamification spaces, this is the space a consumer is faced with in their current life.

“As such, when a brand engages with consumers now, it can show up in these different worlds and adapt itself to be able to exist in those spaces.

“Spaces, he says, “where we don't feel like we are interrupts, but we are disruptors.”



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Embrace the calm and the chaos

Being in these spaces will require agencies to plan in cycles, to derive calm, but also to exist within the chaos as it is the chaos that allows brands to move quickly, to be part of culture and to be truly integrated and interconnected in the topical opportunities of the day.

“These are the moments that consumers are consumed by at their various workspaces, around the water cooler moments,” says Sharman.

“ Purposeful purpose is incredibly important for 2024 ”

Purpose for purpose

Sharman is interested in seeing more purposeful purpose from the industry and believes it will be a hallmark of 2024.

“Brand campaigns and opportunities need to be for communities and for everyday South Africans to change lives, and not just be one-off, one-hit wonders that just generate news headlines and a photo opportunity, and then the brand moves on, and that community just has to get on with it,” he says.

In 2023 Retroviral was named the AdFocus Awards Small Agency of the Year and Provoke Media's African Consultancy of the Year and the only African and South African agency to be listed in Provoke Media's 2023 Global PR Agencies of the Year. The agency is responsible for memorable campaigns such as Nando's Last Dictator Standing, My Creepy Teacher for Creepy Crawley, and 6060 Swindler for Checkers Sixty60.

Follow Mike Sharman on X: [@mikesharman](#) [@retroviral](#)

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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