

Advertising the advertising industry

Issued by [Advertising Media Forum](#)

21 Jun 2021

There is the old adage that says: "The shoemaker's son always goes barefoot." According to the Oxford Reference, it is a proverbial saying from the mid-16th century, meaning that the family of a skilled or knowledgeable person is often the last to benefit from their expertise.



Photo by Yingchou Han on Unsplash

I think the advertising and communications industry has a habit of being the shoemaker in this fable. It has often been said that for people who work in the communications industry, we are amongst the worst when it comes to communicating with each other. Nowhere is this truer than when it comes to talent recruitment in the communications space.

Our industry is filled with people who 'accidentally' came into advertising. Very few professionals today actually studied and qualified with a marketing qualification. For example, my first boss qualified as a school teacher before joining the media industry. (She was a brilliant media person, and a great mentor.) Many people only learn of media or strategy as a speciality once they have qualified. It is not a career that they consider at school.

Ask a sample of matric students what they know about the communications industry and you will be shocked to find out how little they know, if anything. At best I suspect you might find the odd "You make ads to put on TV." Our industry is unique, vibrant and, once young people get to know it, it is very appealing to them. You get to be really creative, you are encouraged to think outside the box, the pay is not horrible and the perks are pretty good.

Yet year after year, we hear from agency leadership that there isn't enough good talent coming into our industry? We only have ourselves to blame.

Why don't the media owners, creative and media industries club together and really launch communication targeting young school leavers, students and graduates to try and join this crazy world? Surely, there are some bright minds out there who would love to one day build a brand, revolutionise media and make a name for themselves as expert communicators?

But we don't, we are indeed like the shoemaker – neglecting his own son.

Then once young people join our industry, we do a pretty poor job of communicating with them on an ongoing basis.

There are good tertiary structures in place that get students from bright-eyed scholars to industry ready professionals. Kind of. But that is again where we as an industry fail our young ones. Many young people working in our industry today will admit that they don't know quite where they are going. Many would love some mentorship and lesson sharing. Some communication.

If this lack of communication was a client brief – I bet we would come back with plans to host webinars, speaker engagement sessions, media owner partnerships and so much more. Yet, it isn't happening? That poor shoemaker's son is again standing in the back of the queue instead of benefitting from dad's expertise.



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2021 has made us all look at how we do business in a new, different and novel way. Let's encourage our industry bodies like the ACA, AMF and Amasa to really step up the effort to spread the gospel of communication. Let's work to have every second matric student aspire to be the next Nunu Ntshingila, Pepe Marais, Zibusiso Mkwana, Koo Govender or Kevin Ndinguri.

As the AMF we are committing to this challenge.

About the AMF

The Advertising Media Forum (AMF) is a collective of media agencies and individuals including media strategists, planners, buyers and consultants through whom 95% of all media expenditure in South Africa is bought. The AMF advises and represents relevant organisations and aims to create open channels of communication and encourage and support transparent policies, strategies and transactions within the industry.

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