

Brewing brands to be Africa fit

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Africa's population is young and growing and the continent is being touted as the next big growth market for alcoholic beverages. But big brands hoping to tap into this growth must take a step back to make sure their messaging isn't being lost in the wake of Africa's cultural revolution, says Dylan Kruger, strategy partner at M&C Saatchi Abel, part of the M&C Saatchi Group South Africa.



Africa is home to 16% of the world's population yet only consumes 5% of the world's beverage alcohol. In fact, out of the 10 countries with the [lowest alcohol consumption in 2019](#), four of them were African. This low per capita consumption rate translates into considerable potential for brewers looking to invest into an uncharted market. There is good reason to be optimistic: sub-Saharan Africa's population is growing at 2.8% a year - twice as fast as South Asia (1.2%) and Latin America (0.9%)- and according to alcohol consumption [forecasts](#), the region's alcoholic drinks market will grow by 15% over the next two years. The expansion in beer production alone is predicted to help fuel a 12% rise in beer volumes by 2023.

What's on tap?

The continent – said to hold untapped market potential – is undergoing a significant shift propelled by economic and logistical advancements, and the potential within the broader region to reach a huge population base – more to buy means more to sell. This has led to most industry players placing greater emphasis on the continent, investing in breweries and increased production capacity to ensure the supply is able to meet the demand.

Yet despite this exponential sector growth, the marketing environment remains poorly understood and holds a reputation for complexity. So what does this mean for brands looking to increase their continental footprint?

A quick glance at the latest [Google Arts and Culture Report for Africa](#) shows that Africa is undergoing “an authentic cultural revolution”. Both millennials and Gen-Zs are claiming their own African voice, identity and style, leading to rich breakthroughs in technology, creativity and cultural viewpoints. Most importantly, we're witnessing the rise of a strong youth voice that challenges tradition in a way that remains respectful, transformative and optimistic. Africa is having its moment in the sun – something both socially significant and strategically valuable to those willing to pay attention. In an environment where cultural and creative revolutions are sweeping through literature, the arts, film, video games and fashion design, advertising must likewise take up “arms” if it is to remain relevant.



Harnessing the insights behind the data

Marketing must first understand, and then harness and shape cultural insights to an audience that is increasingly digitally savvy and looking for relevant and authentic conversations. What works for a global brand on Western continents won't cut it in Africa if brands want to engage and retain the African consumer meaningfully. Practically, this means getting on the ground and speaking to people. It means taking the time to learn deep-rooted cultural truths and ways of seeing the world that resonate with audiences – this goes as deep as understanding the unique nuances between towns that are situated from as little as 200kms apart.

Creative strategists must seek authentic engagement and avoid applying a one-size-fits-all-of-Africa approach before trying to map an audience they may know very little about. Cultural, geographical, language and religious differences, to name but a few, must all be taken into account when developing marketing strategies. An example of this was work done on a well-known local beer brand that required a communication strategy that spoke to both the older generation of beer drinkers, as well as a younger market with vastly different goals for the future. Integrating both generations into a campaign that celebrated their unique, age-specific drinking occasions meant that neither was left out of the communication mix and the campaign was embraced and loved by both.

It is this nuanced approach that has also given us the biggest advantage in retaining the digital advertising account for one of the world's most beloved beer brands, Heineken, for over 10 years. Over the past decade we have increasingly placed more focus on a strong orientation around how to grow our client's top line and market share while using creativity and strategy to serve up beautifully simple digital solutions that authentically resonate to stop people in their tracks. There has never been a more exciting time for brands to capitalise on the rich diversity and authentic creativity that can be brought to life just by giving creatives the license to start telling insight-driven cultural stories.

Of course, alcohol advertising is always subject to legal guidelines, although these are largely self-imposed by advertising industry bodies and drinks companies themselves. But if brands can use the power of authentic creativity to break down the singular views of those who hold the monopoly over ideas that are increasingly becoming less relevant and allow storytelling to move to the beat of a different drum, the thirst of an untapped African market will remain unquenchable.

How we've managed to sustain client success

As strategy partner and having worked at M&C Saatchi Abel on the agency's longest running account – Heineken - for the last seven years, Kruger shares his top three insights on marketing an alcohol brand to African consumers.

1. As an agency, we got to this point first and foremost by harnessing the power of data. Through our consumer

research teams we developed insight-driven market guides for various markets such as Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Rwanda, DRC, Congo-Brazzaville, Mozambique, Namibia and of course South Africa. These guides identify the core data sets that allow us to focus on the most relevant media channels that we leverage with relevant content across 19 markets for 22 brands. The digital platforms most relevant to our core audiences allow for insight into upcoming channels that could lead innovation first ideas, and of course new and best performing formats in order to keep producing relevant work that resonates.

2. As an agency underpinned by the philosophy of Brutal Simplicity of Thought, applying advertising strategies to the continent doesn't mean that we make our work in Africa simplistic or generic – an easy trap to fall into. Rather, we strip away the unnecessary and focus on those authentic and culturally relevant elements that are core to all of our successful campaigns, brands or communication pieces. We understand that Africa is diversely nuanced and we adapt our communications to meaningfully connect with our different audiences.
3. Complexity shouldn't be the default setting, creativity and culture should be. Whether it is taking a global brand and localising it, designing a brand from scratch that needs to work in multiple markets or shifting a local brand from one market to the another, the principles of creativity remain the same. It's having a deep understanding of the audience that needs to drive the creative output.

Ultimately, the key to successfully harnessing market insights to drive success within the alcohol category is deeply rooted in understanding the operational markets and the nuances that come with them. In order to create relevance for a global brand it's imperative that localisation of work be underpinned by a deep understanding of the audience, regional-specific creative and content, and leveraging global assets with a local lens.

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