

A strongly resonant brand proposition is more important now than ever before

 By [Doug Place](#)

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"It took millions of years for man's instincts to develop. It will take millions more for them to even vary. It is fashionable to talk about changing man. A communicator must be concerned with unchanging man, with his obsessive drive to survive, to be admired, to succeed, to love, to take care of his own." - Bill Bernbach



Doug Place is the chief marketing officer: Africa, Middle East, South Asia. Image supplied.

Any article dealing with marketing trends is almost always prone to that increasingly prevalent marketing malady: novelty bias. We just love new stuff. We tend to see current states and ways of doing things as automatically stale, and mistake newness for real innovation that results in growth.

If we only did new stuff, goes the logic, our brands would grow we would be admired for the mavericks we privately believe we are, and fame and abundance would only be a TikTok click away. So before sharing any thoughts on what the trends for the year could be, it's worth pausing for a moment to remember what won't change.

“ The primer for brand growth has always been a strong, tightly defined, and compellingly communicated brand proposition. As we face increasing economic and social uncertainty, a strongly resonant brand proposition is more important now than ever before. It's certainly more important than the efficacy with which marketers can address any particular trend. Brands with vague and ephemeral brand positioning are unlikely to win the hearts of those they are speaking to, since no one will understand what the brand is selling, who they're selling it to, and why anyone should buy it. ”

Rant over. Here are some trends to pay attention to next year:

1. Digital vs traditional? The answer: Yes.

The seemingly relentless rhetoric surrounding the role of digital media remains unabated and is unlikely to change in 2020. That said, it's increasingly apparent that it is not the panacea that the hype would have us believe. Brands that have succeeded in the recent past have done so by meaningfully connecting with their intended target audience in a variety of media, not just online.

What will likely emerge in 2020 are the increasingly important conversations around online ad fraud and the deepening moral question of spending advertising rands on social media brands that are coming under rightful scrutiny in a post-Cambridge Analytica world.



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The role of technology in reducing the friction associated with consumer transactions is likely to continue. However, such technology and the virtual experiences they offer are unlikely to replace authentic human experiences and interactions since that need remains as prevalent as ever.

2. Pay attention to inflexible minorities

The idea that disruptive trends emerge not from the majority but from inflexible minority groups is a [compelling one](#). Today rapidly growing veganism (or at least flexitarian eating habits), an intolerance of brands who are environmentally careless, and the role of thoughtful representation of gender and race (among others) in advertising are no longer the sounds of a discontented niche audience, but a rising tide of consumer activism that marketers would do well to pay attention to.

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Contrary to many trend speculators a few years ago, disruptions in the food industry haven't been brought about by robots, 3D food printers, and AI software. Disruptions have come from (mostly) young people whose appetite for animal protein has abated considerably for a variety of well-documented reasons.

3. Rise of the aggregators

The role of online aggregators helping consumers navigate the wide ocean of choice within categories is hardly a new one. Getting comparable quotes for car or home insurance has been an established online behaviour for years. What is new is the application of the same behaviour to leisure brands as well as food delivery brands like Uber Eats and Mr D and many more in their stead.



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What marketers will need to get their heads around in 2020 is the ability to drive brand preference within these platforms beyond price exclusively. Many of these platforms rank primarily on price and discounts, and the service delivery fee (to brand and consumer) associated with buying from an aggregator has significant margin implications, overlooked at the brand's peril.

4. Marketing marketing

Pressure on the marketing function will continue to increase in 2020, owing in part to the same on company turnover as the South African economy continues to tighten wallets across the wage spectrum. The stress on the marketing function is also born out of a growing distrust of marketers' abilities to adequately address business challenges.

In an eye-opening piece of research commissioned by Masa, it's shockingly apparent that marketers are known for making eloquent excuses for business (brand) performance, but not for creatively solving said challenges. Hopefully 2020 will be the start of a recalibration of the marketing team to other core operating functions, and their discipline will be rightly associated with company performance and not incidentally so.

In general, brand-lead companies that are able to solve real consumer problems and enjoy the resultant value exchange are far more likely to have a great 2020.

ABOUT DOUG PLACE

Doug Place is the Chief Marketing Officer of Nando's IMEA. He is responsible for leading a team that implements the marketing strategies for Nando's restaurants in more than 13 countries across Africa, the Middle East, India and Pakistan. Doug won't tell you that he has received more than 30 international and national marketing and advertising awards, but he will share his thoughts and lessons for anyone excited about the future of marketing in South Africa.

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