

The township talk: getting to know your consumers

 By Leigh Andrews

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With its founder going so far as to state the LSM isn't being used correctly, how do you get to know your consumers based in the townships? By holding daily, meaningful conversations with them, says Brands Laduma CEO Peter du Toit...

It's become 'talk of the town' for marketers that township consumers are poor, but aspirational. But what exactly does this mean? Are we lumping those who live in Gugulethu along with those from KwaMashu or Soweto? How can brands looking to reach township consumers figure any of this out? Du Toit feels the only way is to steer away from simply relying on broad marketing segments like the Living Standards Measure, as these give an imperfect picture of these target audiences - it is only through daily, meaningful conversations that a brand can truly gain insight into how people think and buy. Du Toit explains this as well as how to hold these conversations, no matter how far removed those in townships are from the city centres where brands usually live.

■ 1. Let's cut to the chase: What does 'aspirational' actually mean in the townships?



Peter du Toit

Du Toit: Aspiration in the townships is no different to aspiration anywhere else in the country. A kid in the township has the same "amount" of aspiration as one living in the suburbs, but due to circumstances, he may not be able to fully realise his aspirations yet. The path to success and self-fulfilment is much clearer for a kid growing up in the suburbs. This isn't a uniquely South African situation. The same would apply when comparing a kid growing up in the Hamptons with one growing up in the Bronx.

2. OK then. Give us a poor example of 'reaching the masses in the townships'.

Du Toit: Just about any kind of 'spray and pray' media campaign aimed at township residents is an example of doing it wrong. Township residents aren't a demographic, and they are certainly not an LSM bracket.

■ 3. Let's expand on that, how broad marketing segments like the Living Standards Measure give an imperfect picture of these target audiences - what should we rely upon instead?

Du Toit: It is only by having a conversation every day with people you are researching that you can reliably say that you know who they are. I think it is very telling that one of the founders and pioneers of the LSM, Dr Paul Haupt, thinks that it is largely being used incorrectly. He wrote on the South African Audience Research Foundation website: "SAARF regularly receives phone calls from people who say 'My target market is LSM 9 and 10 - please tell me who they are?' This is enough to make you cry! The SAARF Universal LSM® should not be used in isolation. Human beings are much too complex to be described using a single differentiator such as LSMs. Users of AMPS data know that when combining LSMs with other descriptors such as language, income, life stage and so on, powerful segmentation of the market can be achieved." Yet LSMs continue to be used as a standalone measure of people - perhaps because it is easier to assume that it is an equivalent measure of income, race or even the willingness to spend. To put it bluntly, LSMs are not actionable information.

■ 4. "It is only through daily, meaningful conversations that a brand can truly gain insight into how people think and buy" - how can we facilitate these conversations? Does social media come into it, or is it mainly about the more expensive, paid-for media?

Du Toit: Paid-for media should be the end-strategy after a process of communication with the target audience. Otherwise it is based on poor assumptions that often alienate instead of positively engaging the audience. With more and more people joining the South African online community, reaching township people via digital channels is becoming easier. In May

2015, the highest number of users accessing via mobile were using an Android device. We're seeing a shift away from feature phones and Blackberry devices to Android - a definite sign of greater online penetration within our mostly black audience. Social media activation is definitely becoming more of a possibility, but we still think that understanding and using township networks is more important. For example, we found in a recent survey of banking habits amongst Soccer Laduma Supporters Club members between 18 and 24 years of age that they still heavily rely on advice from their families and communities when researching and deciding on which bank they want to use. Companies should be reaching into township communities to be able to affect the decision-making and conversations about them right where they happen.



Township at sunset © Peter Wollinga – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

■ 5. *How can marketers more effectively reach township consumers?*

Du Toit: Townships have extensive networks and links built around a variety of organisations. Some companies are starting to tap into these to reach specific audiences, like the banks now offering a variety of 'club accounts', which is just a formal version of the decades-old stokvel idea.

■ 6. *Interesting. Lastly, give us a 'how to' approach on getting this right.*

Du Toit: A company should be seeking to establish a good understanding of its consumer base, which is based on constant conversation. Understanding is the ability to comprehend, to be sympathetically aware of other people's feelings and having good insight and judgment. This can only happen if the company acts like a friend would, by having common themes or a common language. We happen to share such a language with our readers, which is football. Anyone from your local barman to the guy sweeping the street to your doctor can be a football expert, and they will want to share their opinion. We give them the space to have this interaction with us and with other fans, and as a result, we've built up a big trust over the years. Of course it will be different for other companies that can't automatically establish this kind of relationship with consumers, and our advantage is that we're able to leverage our relationships to open up spaces for other companies to join the conversation.

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ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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