

Time is a valuable currency in the distraction economy

 By [Kat Scholtz](#)

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In a world where distractions are in heavy supply and where marketing is in low demand, companies need to start thinking about consumers' time and attention as a form of currency.

Companies that want to cut through the clutter of today's noisy media environment need to start thinking about communication with their customers as an exchange of value.

Consumers easily disengage

The exchange takes the form of the customer spending time and attention listening to a brand's message in exchange for entertainment, information and education. Today's marketing environment is fragmented, with numerous distractions competing for a consumer's attention.

He or she might be engaging with four or five channels at once, between the screens and channels in the work or home environment. Never before have consumers had such limited time and so many ways to spend it.



alphaspirit via [123RF](#)

This means that marketers need to start thinking about consumers' time and attention as a currency that they can use to 'buy' services and content that have some value to them. As such, marketing must be positioned as a product in itself that the audience will want to engage with.

Marketers can no longer count on captive audiences listening to radio ads in cars or giving a newspaper their undivided attention. That means hard, direct selling no longer works - customers tend to simply disengage and focus on something else when they see overt sales messages.

As a result, brands need to start thinking about the world from the customer's point of view. This will enable them to shape messages that are valuable, interesting and emotionally appealing to their target audiences.

Storytelling

The Sanlam 'R1 Man' campaign - which tracked the adventures of a man who paid his way for a month using only R1 coins - is a perfect example. This campaign brought a story about financial prudence to life in a compelling manner with a clear emotional hook and a tangible human interest angle.

This campaign really set Sanlam apart in an industry where many companies produce dry, conservative ads with high production values. It cuts right through the clutter in a competitive market segment.

Companies should find new avenues for marketing that allow them to engage with their customers on a day-to-day level, adding value to their lives. For example, beauty brands could offer beauty tips through blogs and social media without directly selling their products.

Financial services companies, meanwhile, could wrap personal financial planning services and information around the banking services they offer through online banking and mobile apps.

ABOUT KAT SCHOLTZ

Kat is the knowledge director at Red & Yellow and drives the conceptualisation, production of content and compilation of video material for Red & Yellow's array of courses. She has played a key role in the globally acclaimed textbook, eMarketing: The Essential Guide to Marketing in a Digital World, since its inception and is the editor of the most recent 5th edition. The book has achieved more than 900 000 downloads to date.

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