

Brands need to embrace new world order, says Dion Chang

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In a world where consumers are being affected by factors such as socio-cultural trends, politics, technology, economy and the environment, brands need to embrace the new world order, which means shifting their values; doing cross-industry collaboration; being more empathetic; stopping talking too much and engage; being at the circle of hierarchies rather than on top; and selling a service, not just a product.

Brand expert Dion Chang voiced these opinions last week Thursday, 4 August 2011, at the Habari Group lecture in Johannesburg.

"We all have to collaborate more and make connectivity a second skin and an air to breath. It doesn't matter who is competing against whom, the most important part is to make it work so that the consumer can be satisfied and have a seamless experience. Otherwise, we risk losing customers," fashionista Chang told delegates.

Push for more engagement

Chang, who said magazine editors should be worried because of the rise of curated content, urged brands to stop broadcasting and push for more engagement in this digital era.

Quoting the latest Unilever report that shows, among others, that 46% of South Africans feel very negative about their personal finances, he unpacked the real impact of the recession in South Africa.

"As the cost of living doubles and continues to go up and life gets stiff [sic], forcing consumers to start being cautious and considered in their consumption, brands need to become empathetic towards their consumers," he stressed, adding that empathy becomes very much important in times like these.

According to Chang, brands need to rethink their old pre-recession business models and perhaps formulate new ones that fit the post-recession environment. One of these post-recession business models, he said, is mass-customisation.

Don't underestimate

On the environment, he called on brands not to underestimate the consumers' affinity in terms of green issues.

"For the first time, we have eco-crimes, meaning those who damage the environment are being treated as criminals. Join

the civil society's concerted effort to save nature, including things like rhino conservation funding."

According to Chang, contributing to the environment results in improves brand loyalty as the public sentiment grows and people demand accountability and transparency.

He also urged brands not to ignore the 'young and the restless' - the majority of young people who do not have jobs but could become their future customers and workforce if they were to be provided with a better education and lot of jobs.

"Everyone's problem"

It is believed that more than 60% of the SA population is under 25 years, and some 25 million of young people are illiterate, while nine million live in fatherless households.

"This is not someone's or only the government's problem, but everyone's problem, so private businesses must get involved," Chang said emotionally.

"If a free society cannot help the many poor, it cannot save the few who are rich," he said, quoting the late US president John F Kennedy.

He also warned brands about underestimating the [millennial generation](#).

Shift social expectations

Chang said as women's power continues to rise - the US had more female workers than male workers in 2010 - brands need to take account of this dawn of the female century and shift their social expectations.

"Doing good these days makes good business sense, and contributes massively not only to community upliftment but also to the people who work for you."

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA: @SIKITIMEDIA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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