

The transformative power of transparency

 By Paula Hulley

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Transparency. Radical honesty. Authenticity. These words conjure up a new era in marketing, one that requires bravery and self-assurance, and will change the industry for good. Because, for audiences, customers and employees that have seen everything, it is time to reveal it all.



Paula Hulley, CEO of the IAB SA.

Transparency is central to our current context

Transparency is now at the core of conversations in the news and media. Customers want to know how their goods are made, where products are sourced, and the values that shape the brands they love. Thinking employees and consumers want to align and identify with the businesses they spend their time and money on.

In transparency lies our power

Dare to be transparent, and people will respond. Retail provides rich examples of this. A recent report by [GfK South Africa](#) illustrated that 54% of South African consumers only buy a product that aligns with their values and ideals, and 45% said that where and how a product is made is very important.

It begins with every individual

Transparency is up to every individual. This authenticity is fundamental for good business. At a group level, a lack of transparency slows the pace and availability of information required to make effective and empowering decisions at the rate and frequency today's world requires. At a company level – a lack of transparency increases job turn over and decreases profit – whereas an increase in transparency generates trust, staff retention, team success and positive momentum. At a country level, a lack of transparency undermines our right to information regarding public entities, and (by 2020) private companies as well. The world we live in demands more than these old, energy-draining tactics and the days of posting a highlights reel, as a business or an individual, are over.

People want to connect with something real, and anything other than that only stands in the way..

Transparency and privacy

As our audiences demand more transparency from brands, there is a simultaneous push to protect the boundaries of personal privacy. This is a fascinating line that we, as digital marketers, need to walk with care and respect. Trust through transparency is vital – customers give permission to use their data in a clear value exchange. Technology such as blockchain must also be leveraged to share the details of how responsible companies operate. For example, blockchains used within [supply chain management](#) can allow for the immutable tracking of anything across the supply chain. This means that consumers can know exactly what their food contains, whether it is organic and fair trade, whether their goods are genuine or produced with respect to workers' rights. While blockchain creates transparency in its process, it simultaneously protects the privacy of its participants. This illustrates how privacy and transparency can cohabit harmoniously.

Transparency for the modern business

Transparency is not a defined goal – it is an ongoing process that has ongoing results. It is a mindset of constantly challenging your business processes to be as authentic as possible. Netflix, in an HR strategy that went viral, did away with a formal travel and expense policy, and a defined leave policy, illustrating their trust in their employees. They believed they had hired capable, responsible adults that were as invested in the outcome of the business as the leadership were, and so empowered to make their own decisions. This is an incredible example of transparent and transformative leadership, and how it can foster a culture of trust between leaders and their employees.

A transparent work environment leads to greater trust, and trust in an organisation is paramount to its success. Not only will trust lower overall turnover rates — 35% of workers say they'd be apt to leave their company if they didn't trust their manager — but it also encourages employees to become more actively involved in problem-solving, transforming the business to move forward, faster.

Reveal, or regret

Transparency is the cornerstone for any conversation, business value, business model or process. More than that, in digital and technology, it underpins how we will transact, now and in the future.

ABOUT PAULA HULLEY

Paula is the IAB SA CEO, with a 20-year career commencing in brand marketing at Speedo, then marketing at Touchline Media, joining digital agency Gloo in its first year of inception, going on to become MD of the CT office, and then MD of the integrated business, Gloo@Ogilvy post the merger with Ogilvy in 2015.

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