

5 digital marketing skills trends to help you manage growth



By [Niamh NicLiam](#)

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For companies looking to grow and expand in 2022, finding and attracting the right digital marketing skills will require a new approach and, more importantly, a new form of leadership.



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When our MD gazed into his crystal ball, one of our predictions was that people would be a top agenda item for digital marketing leaders in 2022. The shrinking skills pool and new expectations from work-from-home staff have placed an additional burden on business leaders. What's more, for those companies looking to expand into new markets, the skills challenge will be all the more complex.



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We have chosen five issues that digital marketing leaders should be aware of if they hope to address the skills challenge facing us all in 2022.

1. Searching for unicorns

There is no doubt, 2021 was a challenging year for digital marketing leaders in charge of skills. We struggled all year to find great people, and this was across the board, from junior to senior levels. This trend is set to continue.

When it comes to roles in data science, media management and AI, for example, we know this becomes even more tricky. These skills are niche to start off with and we are also focused on finding people who are a cultural fit. To add to the challenge, our senior and high-end technical skills are increasingly being poached by global companies, which are only too happy to allow our top performers to work remotely. It's no surprise that we refer to these hard-to-find candidates as unicorns.

2. Staff and clients will respond to companies that lead with heart

As we move out of a turbulent two years consumers have been left jaded. They've been contending with seismic changes to their lifestyle, to their environments, and to the world around them. South Africans have seen the devastation of state capture and to add to this there is the constant background worry about climate change. It's not surprising that both consumers and employees are clearly indicating their support for brands who are leading from the front when it comes to sustainability, accountability and authenticity.

However, this must be genuine. It can no longer just be about the quick sale or the strong bottom line, but rather about investing in the things that will add value to people and their environment. We see brands who can achieve this as having a much better chance of holding onto their human capital.

3. Making a difference for clients will make all the difference to your teams

A big part of keeping your top skills is to challenge and engage their minds. From an advertising and marketing perspective, agencies that truly immerse themselves in solving their clients' business challenges, and who show a curiosity and a drive to support them in their journeys, will be able to forge long-term partnerships that can give their top talent the career challenges they are looking for. It's not just about solving problems to meet performance targets, but also about creating intellectually stimulating environments in which great minds thrive.

Companies that allow their own people to thrive with honour and with heart will undoubtedly pass this cultural approach onto their customers, whether they be B2B or B2C, and will end up winning on two fronts.

4. Staffing for growth requires a nuanced approach

Another big challenge in 2022 will be managing skills for growth. Many of our clients are expanding into Africa and it's important to remember that different markets will come with unique nuances. Taking a one-size-fits-all approach will simply not work.

Consumers are savvy when it comes to brand communications that resonate with them at a local level. If they think that a foreign company is trying to cut corners and apply foreign approaches to local challenges, they will simply walk away. The same will go for South African B2B companies trying to do business with local companies into Africa.

The best way to avoid this is to make sure you have local insight.

Creating in-market expertise can be achieved through collaboration - either through JVs with local firms or even acquisitions. This will allow you access to their local knowledge while upskilling your existing team in the new market nuances.

Aside from JVs and acquisitions, companies could also look to grow local talent pools by creating internship programmes for cross-pollination of knowledge.

5. Growing your skills from the ground up

Finally, as we tackle the year ahead, dealing with a dearth of work-ready skills requires us to take urgent action. Most companies are not in a position to match global salaries so, while we should do everything we can to entice our senior skills to stay with local organisations, we must also urgently address our future skills pipeline.

Taking a longer-term approach to growing skills at an industry level has become incredibly important. Investing in junior skills will not only benefit your company but set them up for success. Collaboration will allow us to see faster and more meaningful returns and getting involved with industry bodies, like the IAB South Africa, makes tremendous sense.

ABOUT NIAMH NICLIAM

Niamh NicLiam is the director for growth and partnerships at Incubeta. Niamh joined the Incubeta group in January 2015, and since then she has helped build successful partnerships with many local and global brands.

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