

## Pivoting to digital; audiences, privacy and access

The penultimate in our ACA series features three senior IAB SA executive board members, Claire Cobbedick, GM Gumtree South Africa and vice-chair IAB SA; Avani Singh, founder and co-director Alt Advisory and IAB SA Regulation Council chair; and Fahmeeda Cassim-Surtee, CEO of DStv Media Sales, discussing the increasing value of digital advertising and marketing, privacy, PoPIA and FPB legislation, connected TV and the future of digital audiences and content, hosted by Rutendo Nyamuda.

This interview is also available on [YouTube](#), and at [BizTakeouts](#), via downloadable [App](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#) and [IONO.FM](#).

For the last couple of months, the series has focused on the value being brought to the table by the South African creative, advertising and marketing sector.

Commenting on some of the changes, challenges and opportunities since the lockdown hit, Cobble Dick said that because during the hard lockdown trade was forbidden, there was little opportunity for buyers and sellers to connect, but at the end of it they saw a massive resurgence in activity. “It’s interesting because it’s mirrored in some of the other classified sites in European markets where there’s suddenly massive demand.” She attributed this to people currently preferring to buy and sell online to reduce potential exposure to the virus, looking for bargains and a means to make money during these tough economic times.

The real challenge for local publishers is that although impressions are at an all-time high, advertising spend has reduced and so it’s becoming increasingly difficult to continue operating or at least maintaining the same standards of quality. “Whilst we’re now seeing record levels, certainly during March and April, the largest news publishers were seeing never before seen visit numbers, huge, huge volumes of visitors and engagement on their platforms, yet our primary revenue model is based on advertising and ad demand has just really reduced and so there’s this massive need that local publishers are filling, but the opportunity to continue running the business is increasingly challenging, and I think that’s the tough spot that we’ve all been placed in.”

At Gumtree, Cobble Dick said that they’re seeing both large-scale corporate advertisers and smaller businesses impacted by reductions in marketing spend. But this is a challenge that existed pre-Covid, she noted, and that there’s an opportunity for smarter thinking and refining our messaging or propositions.

“ There’s a lot of competitiveness in demand and pricing, in what people will pay for digital impressions... I think the real focus for us is custom building marketing solutions, really considering objectives, spending time on how you define the audience, messaging and doing lower volumes but better quality in conversions, so helping match up the right group of users with the messages from the marketer rather than these giant mass campaigns. ”

Singh noted that one of the key developments they’ve seen is in terms of the information regulator publishing guidelines for information officers and private bodies, the heads of organisations taking on this responsibility and starting to see this as a business imperative. She explained that the head of the organisation is automatically the information officer in terms of PoPI, the primary person for the implementation and oversight for the legislation. “This means that it’s not something you can just simply delegate. Ultimately, your senior executive level is obliged to make sure that this is a strategy that is developed and implemented so we really encourage organisations to take this as seriously as possible, not to be overly daunted by it, not to treat this as a chore, but to really think about this from a business perspective, why it is that your customers will value the fact that you’re treating their personal information in a respectful and reasonable manner, why it is that you’re complying with their rights in terms of the legislation. I think that this is more and more going to become a business imperative, not just a nice-to-have not just a regulatory requirement, but something that’s really central to a business model.”

Cassim-Surtee added that this, having more regulation in digital video advertising, for example, will improve the industry. “When you think about internet-based advertising or digital advertising in its traditional format, you think of this sort of blast approach of lots of brands there, fraud, safety, a whole lot of challenges... I do think that with regulations around data, what it does mean is that in terms of offering more addressability, you are actually accepting more quality over quantity, so I think it will lift the game for the digital economy.”



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Singh added that online content regulation is something that we need to approach cautiously. “I think there’s a lot of concern about the commission of cybercrime, things like issues of hate speech online, things that we genuinely need to be concerned about, but I also think we want to be cautious about making sure that the internet remains a robust and an exciting place for discourse, the exchange of ideas, and a marketplace for people to share content.”

Cassim-Surtee agreed. “A lot of it is up to us as businesses in order to be staying abreast of regulation. So, this thing around self-regulation is important for businesses to thrive and also self-education about regulation.”

Agreeing with Cassim-Surtee, Cobble Dick noted here that while self-regulation is important, there is the support of industry bodies such as the IAB. “The role of the IAB, rather than watchdog, is facilitator, so it’s an enabler providing that awareness and information, education and opportunity, also for industry bodies to share with one another and also determine a common perspective. So, it is very much self-regulation, but then the facilitation and enablement of the IAB as an example in the digital marketing space.”

Singh added:

*“ What we’ve seen now with some of the instances of non-compliance with the regulations is the reputational damage that comes with that and that’s really a business concern, so you can have the information regulator, you can have the press council looking into it, but really it’s what customers are requiring, that there is regulatory compliance and that we meet the demands that the law requires. ”*

Cobble Dick pointed to a convergence in all of these thoughts that have been touched on. She said that she thinks PoPI is forcing us to consider our users and what they’re looking for and what’s relevant to them. Going back to her original point with regards to making sure that we’re closer to marketers’ objectives, she said, “I think that those actually overlap because it’s making sure that you’re targeting people who are most interested in the message you’re delivering and then it becomes a win-win situation.”

On this point, Cassim-Surtee said,

*“ It’s important to understand what the technical possibilities are and to mix that with the creative possibilities from a brand and then create an ad experience that is really reflective of what viewers actually want to see, and in that way you’re able to marry content with advertising creative... Let the advertising be quite immersive in the content, let it look like you’re not out of that environment completely so that the viewer completely enjoys that as well. ”*

Cobble Dick added that this might require more work because it means that you then need to create creative that fits that particular environment, but the opportunity for success is that much greater.

For more of Cobble Dick’s, Singh’s and Cassim-Surtee’s learnings and insights, [watch the full interview](#).

This industry-wide initiative for conversations around sustainable solutions to common issues facing SA’s marketers and marketers, to future proof the industry, is made possible by the Association for Communication and Advertising.

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