

Are we human or are we brands?

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Musa Kalenga, chief future officer at the House of Brave opened the Association for Communication and Advertising's Apex 2018 'Next Level of Thinking Masterclass' last week. He shared insights and his view on where things are going, shifts that are taking place and why he believes we ought to solve real human problems before we think like brands and allow the technology to get ahead of itself...



Musa Kalenga

Computing: Desktop to mobile

Emerging markets have leapt from desktop to mobile and Kalenga believes that the latter will be the device that will usher us into the 21st century and the reason we will become the next continental powerhouse.

Screens: Big to small

We've shifted from big screens to small screens, but the implication is huge. "If, for example, you're an online retailer who had the luxury of 'this much' space on an iMac, now you have to work in a 5x7cm space to sell a hat or sneakers." This changes consumer behaviour and means that you have to serve the right thing to the right person in the right context.

Devices: Single to multi

According to research, if we add up the amount of time being spent on smartphones, on cellphones as well as tablets, it's about double the amount of time people are spending in front of TV screens, and 31% of people are using more than one device at a time. So, the devices themselves have shifted from single to multi-devices.

Stimulus: Text to visual

Stimulus has also shifted. We've moved from a fundamentally text-based environment to a highly visual environment. Take Facebook as an example. When it started, you were able to update your status. But now, you're able to include gifs and all sorts of interesting things that make it a more visual medium to interact with.



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Information: Search to discovery

Information has gone from search to discovery, and by that, Kalenga means that the way in which people are finding information is changing, and the gap between content creation and the ability to consume content will continue to widen, he believes. “If you look at the way people are finding info now versus how it’s accelerating, you need to be aware of something called [Zuckerberg’s law](#).”

Mark Zuckerberg, chairman and CEO of Facebook, says that every year, people double the amount of information they post on the platform. So, if you post three times this year, next year you’ll post six times and the following year you’ll post 12 times, and that will continue to compound, but that the ability to consume content starts to taper up.

All this content being produced is going to become increasingly difficult to find, which means information is going to need to find you.



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Disruption: A little gift from the age of augmentation

Although Kalenga doesn’t like the word, ‘disruption’, he believes it’s a gift. “I think it’s a gift that if we understand how it works, we can start to change the way we do things, build products, understand brands, target consumers and develop a value in the 21st century.”

He mentioned visionary, futurist and keynote speaker [Maurice Conti](#), who speaks about three phases in which we’re going to discover the 21st century in the age of augmentation: passive; generative; and intuitive.

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“ There are things that computers will always do better than human beings. The line we need to draw in the sand is ‘What will humans always do better than computers?’; and this notion is going to be the real thing that is going to help us to survive in the age of augmentation. ”

Kalenga referred to the book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari, who says that our ability to rally as humans to feel, to be empathetic is the reason we’ve been able to survive, and according to the [Human Development Index](#), the state of human wellness is generally improving.

He then referred to [Moore’s Law](#) regarding accelerating technological progress. “The challenge is that when you overlay one with the other, you get something called ‘Kalenga’s conundrum’, because I’m asking the question that, ‘If we are getting technology accelerated at such a rate, that Elon Musk and so many others are able to send people to the moon, why can’t we feed people on earth, and if tech is as amazing as it is, why isn’t it fundamentally solving more human problems?’”

He believes that we need to start bridging the gap between technology accelerating and the way we’re solving problems for humanity. “That’s where the magic is…”

“The order in which we do things has to be fundamentally around changing lives before we grow revenue.” Businesses need to be rewired to have these two things in order to be sustainable and relevant.



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The South African proverb, ‘Lift as you rise’ is the cornerstone of how we will be able to continue to be humans in the age of augmentation, he said, and if we understand our place, we will understand the role of technology.

WhatsApp is a classic case in point. When Kalenga worked at Facebook, he wondered why they weren’t monetising the app, but the key was not to monetise until, without a shadow of a doubt, it proved to solve a human problem, and today, WhatsApp is replacing emails. Why? Because it is solving a human problem.

“So, I put it to you that winning at the commercial application of what we need to do is important, but I think changing lives in the context of an emerging market and a market that needs people’s lives to be changed is more important. Acting like a human before we think like brands will be the only way that we can survive in the age of augmentation.”

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For more, go to Musa Kalenga's personal website Kalenga.me, HouseofBrave.co.za and/or Acasa.co.za for info on the event itself.

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