

Investing in culture, content and creativity

In the fifth episode of Bizcommunity and the Association for Communications and Advertising's video interview series, marketing industry leaders Monde Twala, senior vice president and co-general manager of ViacomCBS Networks Africa and Mbali Hlophe, Gauteng MEC for Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation discuss investing in culture, content and creativity.

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

Rutendo Nyamuda hosts this series, which is aimed at unpacking the economics and contribution of advertising to business in a post-Covid economy. Here, some powerful insights from Twala and Hlophe, pointing the way to futureproofing economies...

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

Commenting on the sector and how it has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, Twala said that despite the challenges they've been faced with, they've been inspired by innovation and creativity and in turn have sought to inspire communities and audiences to navigate this difficult time. "As content makers, as media and broadcast media channels, we've had to dig very deep, in terms of how we come up with new ways of doing things. I think Covid has really pushed us forward and forced us to innovate and think differently."

“ *Innovation is the new gold.* ”

Not only in terms of how they produce content and tell stories but also how they use their resources. "It's very important for us to drive the sentiment of 'alone together', but it's also important to inspire people to stay home and communicate the messaging in terms of washing your hands regularly, wearing your mask and so on..." He said businesses have had to take their communications to the next level and the challenge is telling that message in an informative way that is also entertaining and engaging. This has been their key focus.

Hlophe said that the restrictions that have been put in place are an anti-thesis to the way they work. "Sports people are used to performing and being part of mass gatherings, and that was taken away immediately... The downside is the impact it has on the sustainability of these sectors, but when we took the conscious decision to go virtual, it was great to have the likes of ViacomCBS on board because they truly enabled us to be able to continue with the work we do, which really is about servicing society. But importantly, as much as we're calling for people to stay at home, we need to give them a reason to stay at home."

ViacomCBS Networks Africa recently partnered with the Gauteng Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation for the Youth Day celebration concert on 16 June. Commenting on this, Twala said that the goal was to deliver engaging content that speaks to the youth. "I think it's the strength of our platforms and the strength of our media to drive 'edutainment' – entertainment content with a heavy focus on purpose – and I think that's what we've managed to do with our local government partners."

Hlophe said that the relationship between the two entities, both government and ViacomCBS and other private sector bodies is critical, as is edutainment and platforms such as ViacomCBS's. "I think we've been able to work together and hold each other's hand and we're in this together, how do we all play our part, how do we make sure we're able to work together during this difficult period, but to make sure that we still achieve what our joint objectives are."

She added, "Edutainment is critical for us as government and for the developmental state because the assumption that people only get educated through the confines of a classroom, through entertainment you're able to break those barriers so that people are constantly able to grow, whether it's a young person or an old person, but through bringing forth programming that is still able to engage them intellectually and take them to the next level of their understanding."

For government, having relationships with the likes of Viacom is essential in getting their messaging across. "We really do need to draw everybody in, utilise the strengths that we don't have, but we're able to work together and share of each other's and to feed on each other's strengths so that we can flatten the curve as we're required to. But this is not something that is limited to this Covid pandemic and I think this is one of the critical lessons that we're taking out of it."

Then in answer to Nyamuda's question on whether Twala sees potential for a new dawn of local artists to get involved, via certain channels reaching a wider audience, he said he's proud of what Viacom has done over the last couple of months in partnering with the department, and acknowledged that it's the role of platforms such as Viacom to creatively ensure concepts or programmes that keep artists working. "I think they [the department] have the foresight and vision to continue to inspire and build and develop as to how we creatively ensure we can come out with concepts or programmes that can keep artists working because, like I said, I think between sport and the arts, it's a huge point of difference in terms of how it can inspire partnerships, business and also just inspire us as a country to unify us at a time when we need to be standing together."

Hlophe added that with the rise of Africa, one of the things that they've been saying, within the department and with other African partners is that they need to consciously invest in the arts. "It's not just a nice to have, it's a must and we say that because if we want to be able to export ourselves, export our culture, export our stories, you really can only do that effectively through the arts. There's no other medium that is as powerful as the arts that you can utilise."

She said people speak about hard power and soft power. "Your hard power would be the utilisation of guns and machines and so on, but soft power is really done through arts, and that's how you're able to capture the imagination of individuals." So the arts are also critical.

Although there are always contending priorities, she acknowledged, "We have an appreciation that as much as government might not have deep pockets, we're able to tap into the private sector, and say to the private sector, let's work together, let's understand that in building brand South Africa, and ultimately brand Africa, this is for the benefit of everybody. Because that's how you are able to make sure that you lift up your brand, you tell your stories so that you expose yourself to what we are about and thereby making sure that you have as many people possible having an interest and investing in the country ultimately."

For more of Twala and Hlophe'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 marketeers, to future proof the industry, is made possible by the Association for Communication and Advertising.

Join the ACA at www.acasa.co.za | www.bizcommunity.com/ACACaresCovid19.

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