

Reinvent yourself in this digital world, brands are told



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"Brands need to reinvent themselves in this new digital world and find new ways to re-engage consumers in order to enhance brand loyalty, otherwise, consumers will desert them," Alexandre Michelin, MSN executive producer for Europe, Middle East and Asia, said today, Wednesday 27 September 2011, at the 2011 Brand Summit hosted in Bryanston, Johannesburg, by CompuBrand and Microsoft Advertising.

"They need to be ubiquitous and create a differentiated product and constantly engage with partners and advertisers - just like we are doing at MSN," he said, emphasising the need for brands to consolidate the co-creation process between brands and users.

Like any other operating in this evolving world, MSN is also facing the same problems and same challenges, he added.

Various platforms create various opportunities

"Be there all the times and across all platforms", he stressed, adding that these various platforms create various opportunities, and the necessity of being there helps create a differentiated product.

"Consumers have become the winners in the fast-changing digital space, where they manipulate not only the brands but also content," Paris-based Michelin warned.

CompuBrand operations executive, Julia Coulson said brands' identity and reputation lie at the heart of the organisation's objectives, that is why, she said, many companies are spending millions of rands for branding and reinventing.

MSN, which has Kagiso Media as its local partner, operates in 46 markets in 26 languages, and reaches over 450 million consumers every month.

'Take your brand to the people'

During his 'Take your brand to the people' presentation, Lumko Mtimde, CEO of Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), slammed the 'Big Four', the country's biggest print media groups - Caxton, Avusa, Independent Newspapers and Media24 - for categorising some of their newspapers in the community media stable.

"These are local newspapers, not community newspapers," Mtimde said.

"Local newspapers owned by conglomerates and mainstream media owners define themselves as 'community media', thus contaminating the market categorisation of the actual community media platforms," he noted.

"This in our view is an attempt to feed off the positive brand reputation that community media platforms have amongst its audiences," Mtimde, a senior ANC member and SABC board member, said.

'Independent' community newspapers, most of them published by 'ordinary' publishers, have been popping up nationwide, but these struggling publications have often thrown stones at the 'Big Four', accusing them of bullying and hostile business behaviour. It is understood that some of these big media groups are being investigated by the Competition Commission.

The advertising value chain

Mtimde called on marketers and advertisers to have a deep understanding of media before they launch their campaigns, urging companies to support community media as they multiply efforts to create brand awareness.

"Even though the number of publications is growing, the amount of advertising to these focused market publications is not growing," he told delegates.

"The biggest challenge facing South Africa today is that big agencies and blue chip companies do not realise the importance of using the small commercial and community media platforms.

"The advertising value chain has been less than effective in the past. Government advertising was channelled through a media buying agency which resulted in an inequitable distribution of government advertising.

"It is important that that you as 'industry leaders' help in strengthening and sustaining our local media," he concluded.

The event's panellists included DigiMark's sales manager Ian Drummond, MSN executive producer Justin Dewhirst and James Leaver.

International fashion star David Tlale also presented I'm David Tlale - a remarkable and inspiring collection of insights of his business.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA: @SIKITIMEDIA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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