

2017 digital media learnings

 By [Audrey Naidoo](#)

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It has practically taken me last year to figure out exactly what is going on behind my digital media buys and I am amazed by how much I did not know. For you who are marketers out there, now is the time to ask the questions from your media agency and to dig deep into the operations behind the scenes.



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It's a whole new world out there with technical jargons, murky waters, innovations and I almost feel intimidated and uncomfortable knowing that there is so much going on that I should be in the know. It's time for brands to start to drive the right conversations and frankly take charge over your media investment. With constant advancements across all big publishers like Google and Facebook with regards to targeting capabilities, data and advanced advertising options, marketers have no excuse not to drive the digital mandate with vigor and precision.

Some of the things that I have learnt from last year:

- Take time to understand the digital ecosystem and how they all function relative to each other, rather than alone. Look for synergies as well as limitations. The upside of this would be reducing inefficiencies and duplications.

- Throwing money into a specific platform or platforms will not necessarily bring in the desired results without proper strategic and tactical planning.
- Social is no longer an island and need to be considered holistically within your media mix. I still sit in meetings where stakeholders are requesting for social media promoted content and think its 'free' or 'cheap'. One needs to review the role of the traditional social media manager who is accustomed to running promoted posts/content on all platforms. Content has evolved and so has social. Using social to drive commercialization is only growing and requires a different mindset. Real-time audience insights should be delivering higher ROI as brands use personalized targeting to different audience sets with variations in messaging. Walled gardens like Facebook have validated, human audience lists so leverage off this.
- I have learnt that by me having access to DoubleClick Campaign Manager (ad serving tool) allows me to view attribution, cross-device tracking, view all media buys from one place and track viewability. If you had doubts about how many paths your customer takes to eventually buy your product, then you should be using DCM or even looking at Google Attribution free tools.
- Be mindful of falling into the 'programmatic trap' – cheap inventory does not mean quality inventory. Key takeouts for me: Most platforms are programmatic these days, which simply means you can buy inventory in real-time and let the machine do the job. However human intervention is still required to ensure that your objectives are being met. Are your ads actually being seen by a human or bot? How do you know? What percentage of your ad is actually being seen in terms of viewability? I would say tread with caution and ask your media agency the right questions. However smart programmatic ecosystems which provide more value in terms of just media need to be considered – rather look for creative studios which are free for agencies to produce creative messaging in real time reducing down-time on creative production and ineffective creative which has limited ad impact.
- Watch out for Premium Buys as they are called premium for a reason as it comes with a price. Review your campaigns weekly and optimize as and when needed. Consider PMP (private market places) as an option so you can influence and define your criteria upfront. Be careful of IOs (insertion orders) as this often is not in the best interest of the client but rather serves the agencies which have their own trading desks. Again transparency between client and agency is critical.
- What can you bring in-house? Many global big brands like Unilever are bringing some of the digital capability in-house and agencies are doing parts of the media buying function. If you are using DoubleClick stack then it would make sense to take control of your programmatic buying and search in-house. Definitely an option in the near future as we see more brands taking charge over their digital media. It makes sense as brands start to connect 1st and 3rd party data, consider data privacy and the openness of sharing your client data externally. Are you comfortable to share your data? Do you have a data management platform (DMP) to capture your unstructured data?
- Does your agency have the data science expertise or are they merely a media buying entity? The agency needs to apply the science to media and hence should have on the team a data scientist or a data analyst. We have access to multiple sources of data and this need to be structured and deconstructed into meaningful insights. The inflow and outflow of data will be the key driver of change in the near future and clients need to be in the know about how this process works. Consider developing a data strategy for your brand first before you start to work with data.
- Tech fees and ad serving costs – clients need to scrutinise your ad serving costs closely and look out for agency mark-up fees which should be disclosed to you. Get to know your ad serving costs and the implications on your total media costs. In some instances you will be paying tech fees as well as ad serving fees. Make sure you understand the difference.
- Moving away from campaign mentality. If your customer is always on then why are you in campaign mode? There is merit in exploring an always on strategy which considers seasonality, lead generation, brand awareness and even customer care. The marketing funnel seems obsolete in the now digital, multi-screen environment. It's more about

being present in the moment it matters – when your customer is showing you the signals that you need to act on. Unfortunately it would be too late to show an ad to a customer searching for your product without fully understanding the journey before the search. Synchronising your offline with your digital screens should be part of your media strategy, not two different strategies which I often see. Cleverly crafting a channel agnostic media plan (not just TV heavy) is still rare but slowly happening within our local market.

Frankly digital media is not what it used to be a year ago. You have to understand the workings behind the scene of a media buy which are not always exposed. Superficial engagement on a campaign level will leave marketers at a disadvantage and ultimately increase your costs and lower your return on investment. There's very limited support on all levels to local markets from big publishers or specialists and until we build our own competencies, you are placing your faith and massive investments in the hands of your agencies. Nothing wrong with that but just ensure you are in the know to asking the right questions to ensure alignment to your desired objectives. The ride is only going to get more jarring from hereon as digital speeds up. 2018 should be a year of transparency and smart implementation on the digital front.

ABOUT AUDREY NAIDOO

I am a professional marketer working with full experience in both traditional and digital marketing. In my current role within Absa, I am responsible for all things digital including influencing and managing the group digital media investment. Focus areas include optimisation of all campaigns, insights driven marketing, innovation and thought leadership. I am a publisher and really passionate about marketing in the future and enabling marketers to upskill and understand the environment we operate in. I freelance on a part-time basis.

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