

Brand safety is not optional, support local publishers

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Marc du Plessis, joint CEO of Spark Media and head of the Publisher Council of the IAB, gave a keynote address at the first edition of [Future Ad Africa](#) in Johannesburg yesterday on the subject of brand safety, trust and supporting the independent press.

Du Plessis looked at what's going on in the digital advertising environment on a global level and how publishers can provide a safe and relevant space for brand exposure.

He started by looking at three areas: unintended consequences, brand fails and worse, brand disasters. When these happen, it's important that you control what you can, he said.

Mistakes happen, brands apologise, but they don't always get this right either. A brand that recently managed to turn a bad situation into good is KFC with its FCK apology. And then there's the Enterprise brand tragedy that's happening at the moment...

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Interestingly, while brands generally obsess about their advertising environments, when it comes to digital, this is often non-existent. Du Plessis said this has to do with the massive explosion of online content and its consumption. But the digital environment has become subject to fake news, pornography, hate speech and so on, and numerous global brands have experienced disasters relating to these and others, so brands should, even more so, be concerned about where they appear in this unpredictable space.



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This is where trust comes in, which Du Plessis believes is one of the most valuable assets a brand can have. “I would argue that trust is one of the most important things you can have. The trust between a brand and a consumer. It takes a lot of time and a lot of money to build that up, and to break that or damage that in any way needs to be really thought about and is certainly not something you can turn a blind eye to.”



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Last month at the World Economic Forum, Edelman presented its 2018 [Trust Barometer](#), which reveals that while trust in platforms declines, trust in journalism rebounds. “Over the last three years there’s been a decline in trust in platforms (-2), being social and search platforms, with a bit of a nice bounce back for journalism (+5), for quality-controlled, safe journalism,” he commented.

Du Plessis also noted Unilever's chief marketing and communications officer Keith Weed's talk at the IAB conference in LA last year where he spoke about trust and how important it is to place your brands in environments that are trusted, saying that brand safety is not optional. "This is not an optional thing. You need to be very careful about where your brands are exposed and how they're exposed," reported Du Plessis.

“ Brand safety is ignored in the online space - global brands are taking back control. [#FutureAdAfrica](#) [pic.twitter.com/yWBbR3cCQv](#)— Mimi Mphaphuli (@fhatumphaphuli) [March 14, 2018](#) ”

Unilever is a great example of a global brand taking back its control in this regard, as it recently threatened to pull ads from Facebook, Google and Twitter over brand safety fears. At the conference Weed said the consumer goods company "will prioritise investing only in responsible platforms that are committed to creating a positive impact on society."



Unilever threatens to pull ads from 'divisive platforms'

13 Feb 2018



"These are the kind of actions that are starting to take place globally," said Du Plessis. "He's working with these brands, these major tech giants, but certainly with a big word of warning to get their act in order."

Similarly, JPMorganChase cut the number of sites it uses from 4000,000 to 5,000 a month, again trying to get some control in the digital space, and Procter & Gamble cut some digital budgets, pulling a lot of that in-house. "It's not about digital not working for them, it's about digital being safer and for them to be able to control what's going on with their brands," he explained.

South African brands need to do the same, he said. He showed us a number of examples from [Media Monitoring Africa](#) of well-known local brands, among the likes of Momentum, Virgin Money Insurance, Standard Bank, MTN, Redefine and Absa, that have unintentionally run their banners alongside illicit content.

Without realising, these brands are actually funding fake news, he said. This is not intentional. They aren't placing advertising in these environments on purpose, he went on. "This has often got to do with how programmatic advertising is being bought currently, so it's important that brands understand what's going on and get their agencies to do what they need to do to try and limit this."

Du Plessis says the reason for this is:

“ Brands are pushing as hard as they can for their agencies to deliver clicks, acquisitions and leads and that's all they care about in digital, with lower limited budgets, so, therefore, the agencies that are buying this media are forced to go for the cheapest, bottom of the pit inventory to try and deliver what the client is expecting from them. ”

In his opinion, there needs to be a balance between fair price and quality ad inventory against low price and high volume. Currently, 400 hours of content is uploaded to YouTube every minute, but how is it physically possible to control that amount of content in real time, every single minute? These are the kind of questions brands should be asking such companies, like Alphabet and Facebook and any other environment where you're spending your digital marketing budget.

"But this is the kind of commentary that's starting to happen, such as Weed saying that they know advertising is more effective when it's running against premium content, and Raja Rajamannar, the CMO of Mastercard, saying that he'd rather pay a bit of a premium to be involved in verified digital spaces."

As a solution, Du Plessis suggests considering directing programmatic budgets towards safe marketplaces and sites that are known and trusted, that still give you scale and performance, as well as the control and the safety that you should care about as brands.

He referred to supporting local publishers. “Without digital journalism... without these Daily Maverick-type brands – doing so much good work to expose the corruption, bribery and criminality that’s going on – we don’t have an independent press, and the only way to get funded is through support from advertisers.”

“ Proudly Gupta! <https://t.co/3ZgzdYJlq1> by ZAPIRO [#StateCapture](#) <pic.twitter.com/mkXvDGueS3>—
PointOfOrderNowOnShowmax (@zanews) [June 3, 2016](#) ”

This is not a philanthropic kind of support, he said. “It’s not about that, it’s about understanding that there is value here and that you can get performance, everything you need from local publishers, and that’s really about a mind shift to understand that it’s not only a good thing for your brands but for the country to start to support local publishers.”



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