

# How to connect FMCG brands with African consumers

 By [Michael Wood](#)

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When it comes to marketing FMCG brands on the African continent, a one-size-fits-all approach does not work. African consumers are looking for locally relevant brands they can connect with and FMCG companies need to understand consumer sentiment and behaviour to avoid failing in their chosen regions.

Africans are very proud of being African and even more proud of the countries they come from, FMCG brands that succeed are considered brands of the people, brands they can trust. Trust is critical in African consumers' eyes and is often built by word of mouth, endorsements by friends and relatives.

## Consumers want to identify with the brand

An African strategy means being relevant at a regional, country or grass roots level to African consumers.

One company that understands this well is P&G, which recognises that Nigerians want Nigerian brands and products and Kenyans want Kenyan brands and products, and so on. This is not just changing a voice over on TV copy: P&G often re-shoots the same TV advertising using exactly the same copy but for different markets, so Nigerian copy has Nigerian actors and feel, Kenyan copy has Kenyan actors and feel - it is important for consumers to identify with the brand as their own.

In addition, MTN in Nigeria is also a good example, it has become a truly ubiquitous brand, a South African mobile network company, yet Nigerians perceive it to be a Nigerian brand and company and they are proud of it.

## Make products appealing

Appealing to African consumers is even more important when it comes to your product offering, locally relevant products that recognise regional or cultural differences are crucial.

For example, beer companies like SAB Miller or Diageo have developed regional brews based on regional tastes, making brews based on maize, sorghum, and cassava dependent on the consumer in each market.

Winning FMCG brands that are successful in Africa have a commonality in terms of their presence; they usually own retail inside and out and are highly visible in all outlets but most importantly in the mass market - in Africa this often means open market, kiosks and small neighbourhood grocery stores. These brands have a presence, on the street and in-store that shares a proximity to consumers, perceived as leaders or power brands by African consumers.

## Targeting the youth market

Appealing to the youth segment is also important, with such a large and growing young population, brands and products that target the youth market have a better chance of long-term success. These youths are increasingly urban, brand focused and surprisingly connected with the explosion of internet on mobile phones, the highest usage being social networking sites.

African consumers have a high degree of mistrust about new brands and products so trial is an important consideration. Ensuring your marketing strategy and execution plans focus on trial for new brands or products is essential.

## Value and affordability are key

Value and affordability are key. This doesn't mean that your products need to be cheap. Affordability is value within a framework of what consumers can actually afford but without compromising quality, in Africa this often translates into a strategy that focuses on

- Sizing, packaging designed around single usage, Africa is full of smaller sized single use sachet packed products (everything from shampoo, to milk powder to vodka is sold in single use sachets);
- Coinage is critical and key price points for consumers and retailers need to be understood;
- Tiering the offering 'good - better - best' or 'value - performance - premium' product offering can also address the affordability challenge.

Given the nature of many urban African markets 'on the go' consumption is a concept that connects with consumers, just look at the number of street hawkers or small convenience outlets you see in Africa: convenience and single serve products are not just a result of affordability, but meets a consumer need for on-the-go consumption."

From a quality perspective, African consumers will often pay more for brands or products that offer uncompromising quality and are considered trusted brands. Often you will hear consumers say "cheap is expensive".

## ABOUT MICHAEL WOOD

Michael Wood is co-founder and Director of Aperio, a business consulting company focused on accelerating growth of FMCG brands in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Michael has many years international experience where he held the positions of Marketing Director, Sales Director and Managing Director with the Gillette company and Procter & Gamble.

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