

Creativity and technology, the best of both in 2021

 By [Brett Morris](#)

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Whenever it comes to discussions around digital media, I sometimes feel like I'm coming across as a bit of a Luddite. So, it's important to state at the outset that I think technology plays a significant role in advertising media and it has the potential to add exponential value.



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But I also feel it's important to point out that some digital media has also failed us and it's not the panacea for all our marketing ails. Perhaps part of the problem is that digital media has changed so much and so rapidly over the last few decades that it's hard to keep up with what has worked and what hasn't. And, just as one unfulfilled promise is forgotten, another replaces it.

If you consider when digital media started a few decades ago, a banner achieved a click-through rate of 50%, whereas now the average is between 0,01% and 0,03%. The novelty has clearly worn off. And more than that, digital banners have become an annoyance to be actively avoided rather than engaged with.

Of course, it's not just about banners anymore and media technology has become much more sophisticated. Media placement now resembles something more like the NASDAQ exchange, with billions of calculations being made and millions of ads being placed at a speed and volume that's hard to fathom, which is probably part of the reason why it is difficult to fully understand which aspects are working and why.

This is of course not unique to digital advertising. Since the inception of advertising there have been questions about the effectiveness of advertising. As John Wannamaker is purported to have said, "Half my advertising spend is wasted; the trouble is, I don't know which half." It wasn't until the last decade that we began to understand why advertising - and in particular more creative and engaging advertising - works. Behavioural economics and marketing science have helped us decode how we make decisions and why it is so important for brands to be creative and distinctive.

But in order to be creative and distinctive it requires us to embrace and nurture an environment that supports creativity. And that is not always easy, which is why some brands will tend to opt for the certainty of metrics. But as we have seen from the rapid fall and decline of many spurious digital media metrics over the years, certainty does not guarantee success. Because no matter how much we want there to be a formula for successful advertising, we simply cannot ignore one of the most important ingredients: creativity.

I find it fascinating that, in discussions around the effectiveness of advertising, it's often done without consideration for how engaging that communication is. As much as 80% of television advertising in South Africa is not remembered or not linked to the right brand.

And, according to Google, as much as 40% of digital advertising is never seen, and that's before we start to measure the effectiveness of the other 60%. So surely before you start any discourse around the effectiveness of advertising, you first need to review how engaging that advertising is. Because, if your communication is amongst the top 20%, it is far more likely to be successful. So, that's a good place to start.

Of course, the other critical component is relevance. How your message is received, even if it is very engaging, will always depend on what part of the journey the customer is on. There is no point trying to sell me a product after I've just bought it, or trying to entertain me when all I want is basic information.

You need to be relevant and engaging at every touchpoint, which is not easy. But it is possible. It requires an appreciation for the complexity of both creativity and technology, and how you bring the two closer together. So that's where much of our focus will be in 2021. Because in a market as competitive as it is, and in a year as tough as it's likely to be, we need the best of both.

ABOUT BRETT MORRIS

Brett Morris is the CEO of Nahana Communications Group. In 2014 Brett was appointed Group Chief Executive and has since been voted by his peers as most admired agency leader in Johannesburg for five years in a row and three times across South Africa.

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