

Load shedding may have dealt media a curveball, but OOH is going nowhere

By Mali Mbtsumi-Garrido, issued by [Tractor Outdoor](#)

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Recently, there've been more than a few conversations that lament the knock that load shedding is having on the out of home (OOH) media industry, specifically digital out of home (DOOH).



We've seen respected marketers and other media professionals postulate (rather irresponsibly, in my humble opinion) that the ongoing drive by media owners to ensure that screens stay on probably means that innovation and expansion have been put on ice.

We've seen others speculate that given South Africa's ongoing power woes, the prediction that DOOH will contribute around 40% of all OOH spend within the next few years is nothing more than a shot in the – ahem – dark.

Of course, load shedding has hurt the media industry – and that's not limited to DOOH but rather every business that relies on an electric cable to operate (spoiler alert, that's just about everyone).

But really, this is only one part of the picture.

As someone who works in outdoor media and sees both the challenges and opportunities with lenses that are clear and not, in any way, tinted, here is what I see.

DOOH will continue to innovate and expand as the industry moves to alternate energy sources

DOOH is predicted to take over around half of OOH ad spend in future and we are seeing major digital expansion and investment into site development. Naturally, advertising budgets are also flowing into digital OOH as it affords marketers flexibility and optimised buying options, especially when these budgets are tight and load shedding is a concern.

While the ramping up of load shedding over the past year-and-a-bit has seen marketers become (understandably) more nervous about injecting large chunks of their ad spend into electronic media – be it DOOH, traditional online media, television or radio – this hesitance is starting to abate as media owners show their mettle and put new solutions and



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contingency plans in place. We're turned to back-up power, alternative energy sources and new technological innovations powered by programmatics. We haven't suddenly forgotten how to innovate – if anything, the current environment has only made us innovate harder.

Do you think that the OOH sector – or any other South African business worth their salt – sits back and says 'We won't make any future plans because of load shedding' – and then allows their businesses to wither and die? Just as with the 2020 lockdown, this curveball will only make us stronger, more resilient, and even better than before.

The saying goes, a 'Boer maak 'n plan' but really, this should be extended to include every South African, because we've always needed to make a plan – and we've gotten hella good at it.

Demand for static OOH will climb

Perhaps a more interesting 'side effect' of load shedding is that static has once again come into its own; in fact, the occupancy rate in SA has seen a 4% increase since last year. We are seeing a renaissance of large format static and geo-targeted campaigns, especially around key retail nodes as well as increasing demand for iconic and wall mural sites. What is especially exciting to see is that brands have started to fully leverage creative extensions and copywriting to enhance campaigns that drive memorability, create shareability and stimulate talkability.

Static OOH is the true reach-build medium, and within a fragmented media world, is one of the only non-digital channels showing an increase in reach. It guarantees 24/7 unmissable exposure – lights on or off – offering cost-effective brand prominence. Furthermore, it also has serious BBE (that's Big Billboard Energy) – also known as location domination power – which helps to build both brand trust and consumer recall.

In the face of ongoing load shedding, we're seeing DOOH innovating while the demand for static OOH rises in parallel.

Our power struggles are likely to position SA ahead of the curve

Finally, bear in mind that power is not a uniquely South African concern. Global OOH companies have started the journey to have power backed up and sustainable energy solutions. In our local market, due to the necessity afforded by load shedding, South Africa has inadvertently 'leapfrogged' the rest of the world simply because we've had to innovate like crazy to survive.

There is a major drive to have OOH digitals power backed up, and as a result, we might be one of the first markets to achieve this lofty goal in a rapid time frame.

One by one, local OOH media owners are sharing their power back up status and many of our peers are already around 70% to 80% backed up. We, at Tractor Outdoor, are applauding our industry for their resilience and sheer determination. On our end, we've committed to being 100% power backed up by the end of July, with the integration of solar solutions being the next phase in our power continuity plan.

So, if there is one thing you should take away from this letter: Do not take away media spend from OOH media; you would be doing your brands a disservice that may even set them back in the coming months.

Invest ahead of the curve, knowing – with confidence – that the industry is working hard to keep your campaign lights switched on.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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