Unlocking Africa's data

By Johan Haupt

Primedia Out-of-Home Africa is working to 'unlock' market knowledge in the 11 countries across Africa in which they operate.

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In South Africa, Primedia Outdoor has invested extensively in acquiring and processing information and research. Using this, we have created a system that allows us to tap into vast quantities of data tailored to the interests of a specific client, and present this in a format that is clear and easy to understand.

Our Marketing Services department uses a geographic information system (GIS) mapping tool that enables us to pull in any industry research that is geographically segmented, and use this to put together custom proposals for our clients.

In effect, what we have done with great success locally, is to convert a billboard sale into an audience sale: our clients buy audiences, they don't buy billboards.

Primedia OOH Africa's current challenge is to roll this out into the rest of the 11 markets in which we operate across Africa, namely Zambia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.

At present, very little information is available on these markets. It can be difficult to access even basic population data within the markets across the rest of Africa, as there are numerous available sources of varying quality, and data is expensive.

Our main objective is to create clarity, by evaluating potential sources of information, acquiring the best of these, and working with them both to inform where we build or buy structures, as well as to assist potential clients in making the best possible decisions as to their media strategy. It's not simply a matter of buying information; we also spend time and resources on processing it and making it useful and easily accessible.

The desired outcome of all our analysis is to tell a regional story. This ultimately serves as a guide to where one should buy OOH (as well as indicating where the focus of any regional marketing activity should be).

As with any story, context is key; if we looked at Lagos for example, (with SA-based clients in mind) it's interesting to note that the area of Lagos City is the same as that of Randburg and Sandton combined, while the urban population density is 10 times that of Sandton/Randburg. Beginning with this information, we would set out to establish where a specific client's target consumers would be likely to converge in large numbers.

Collecting the data

One of our primary sources of insight is spatial data, supplemented by POI (Point of Interest) data bought from TomTom. These allow us to show where hubs of commercial activity are located. For example, again looking at Nigeria, Victoria Island is Lagos's equivalent of Sandton, where you find quite a high density of shopping centres and hence a convergence of economically active consumers ready to spend their disposable income. Visually illustrating this helps motivate the importance of structures located nearby.

The TomTom data includes a vast number of POI locations for a given country – churches, schools; any POI, in fact, that you can punch into your GPS. From this, we can pull up and filter relevant data, tailoring it to our clients' needs. For example, if the client wants to target students, we can isolate all the areas typically pertinent to students: campuses, sports venues, entertainment hubs and so on.

We are also deriving convergence nodes for our markets in the rest of Africa. These identify areas frequented by the segment of the population that is affluent enough to be mobile, by finding places where several specific POI – petrol stations, retailers, fast food outlets, bank branches or ATMs, and taxi ranks – are located close together, guaranteeing a constant high volume of consumers who will return again and again to the same node to do their banking and shopping. This equates to high, targeted reach and frequency.

In South Africa, we have located about 1,100 such convergence nodes, where consumers would go on a regular basis to spend their money. This powerful layer of data acts as a basic roadmap for buying OOH. It also serves as an effective way to design a campaign from the bottom up, and gives the agency/client the ammo to lobby for an appropriate amount of money, as opposed to an arbitrary allocation of budget.

Returning to the Lagos example, there might be 100 of these convergence nodes. So, if you wanted to cover the segment of the market that has disposable income, we could calculate the optimum number of boards required to ensure that each node's consumer base would have an opportunity to be exposed to your message.

A convergence node that features twenty examples from any of these subsets is more important than one that only features ten, so we further segment these into big, medium and small size convergence nodes.

Profiler Data

In addition to this, we have profiler data for each of the countries: population data by region, economic indicators such as GDP figures, inflation rates, interest rates, and various economic indexes. This creates a kind of mini encyclopaedia for each country that we are able to map and visually illustrate, to a certain extent.

To buy or not to buy: Census Data and AMPS

Locally, census data is very important to us. We have valid data that allows us to not only profile large regions such as provinces, but hyper-regionally, down to a suburb level, based on income and a segmentation model that emulates Millward Brown's LSM groupings. However, census data is expensive, and can vary greatly in quality from country to country. We are therefore taking time to evaluate the vintage and quality of the census information on offer, and our clients' perceptions of its usefulness, before we decide whether to buy it.

The same is true of available AMPS (All Media & Product Study) studies in each of our markets. For the past 40 years, this data has been the currency our industry has used in order to guide media planning and buying decisions (although this is set to change in South Africa over the next year). Locally we're able to upload AMPS data into MapInfo and segment a market geographically based on brand or media consumption.

Building portals to knowledge

In South Africa, we have used these sources of information to create what is basically a live portal that allows us to zoom in and gather information regarding any of our local sites. As we progress, we will be increasingly able to do something similar across our other African markets. Ultimately, it's all about the hundreds of layers we can build up, and how to use this information in the best possible way to steer a client – not with subjective opinion, but with hard objective facts – to consider targeting a specific area.

What we do at Primedia through the use of GIS analysis is unique in our industry and adds tremendous value to sales proposals as well as client strategies. We hope to replicate the success achieved locally in our markets across the rest of the continent, with the help of our partners and working closely with our sales team and key clients.

Primedia OOH Africa is an outdoor advertising media specialist operating within Sub Saharan Africa, with over 4,373 faces located in 11 countries across the continent. It offers exposure across a mix of media types, including high end digital signs, airport advertising, freeway and suburban spectaculars and street furniture, as well as static advertising and video walls in malls. Their portfolio expanded in December 2014 with major acquisitions in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Johan Haupt is the Marketing Services Manager for Primedia OOH Africa. He has more than 10 years of experience across various sectors of the media industry including TV and print, as well as extensive media agency experience.

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