

Marketing strategies and the rise of the machine

 By [Tichaona Savanhu](#)

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Tich Savanhu, head of digital strategy at Incubeta SA, looks at what should be highest on the agenda for marketing professionals when crafting their 2020 strategies.



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Despite all the efforts made in 2019, digital transformation remains one of the highest board deliverables as we move into 2020.

Companies are still obsessing about digital transformation and how they should be dealing with it. More and more, we are seeing marketing professionals worrying about how they should position their companies within the digital transformation maelstrom happening around them.

What's more, as many companies try to bring various competencies in-house, they are crashing up against legacy systems and processes, division, and business units that are siloed from a structural and data perspective, as well as a skills shortage as barriers.

Where are you now?

As companies embark on their digitalisation journey, the first, and I might argue the most important, step is for companies to take stock of where they are.

We have found that by using the Google Digital Maturity benchmark we can get a better understanding of where the company “thinks” they are. It then equips us with the right context to frame our questions to get deeper insights and tailor our approach and solutions to focus on the changes that will drive the biggest impact in the short-term.

We also develop a roadmap with key milestones and measures of success in the medium- to long-term. From our experience, we’ve seen that different parts of the business may be further along the digitalisation journey than others, so a highly customised approach is the only way to drive real value.

A serious lack of skills in the industry – especially when it comes to the Google Marketing Platform – has been a real challenge in 2019. So much so we now help companies recruit and have started a dedicated training division to upskill in-house staff to work with the new technologies.

With this in mind, change management is a critical consideration. Peoples’ roles, team structures, business units, technology and the organisation culture will need to adapt and change to fit into the new way of working.

It is critical that there are key people within the organisation, driving the process and who has the authority to remove any blockages that may arise due to organisational structure, systems and processes.

Am I ready for AI and Machine Learning?

CMOs and marketing leaders will also need to ask themselves how they can embrace machine learning and AI and how they will compete with companies who are already doing so.

If we look at the changes on platforms like Google and Facebook, we can see that most of the heavy lifting from an optimisation perspective is now done by the machine. A great example of this is Google’s auction-time bidding, where the algorithm will adjust bids depending on the parameters you have fed it for every single impression, taking into account a rich set of data signals in Google Ads.

AI has also impacted attribution with the introduction of data-driven attribution, where the machine analyses omnichannel users’ journeys, deciding which channels get the credit for the desired action. All of this will impact your digital budget and therefore be integral to your strategy for the year.

Can my digital strategy drive offline performance?

In Australia, some of our clients are creating campaigns that don’t have any digital KPIs. We are working with marketing professionals to design Google Ads campaigns specifically to drive foot traffic for their brick and mortar stores. We have seen tremendous success from these campaigns, and we can expect to see these kicking off in South Africa in the new year. The great thing about this innovation is that we can measure these campaigns far better than we ever could before and they offer exceptional cost benefits for marketing departments.

Have I considered WhatsApp advertising?

Advertising on the world’s biggest chat platform is set to make a big impression in South Africa in 2020. It will almost certainly be a line item in many media budgets. We can expect to see local marketing leaders get their toes wet and then continue to build on these campaigns as the year progresses.

If local marketing pros haven't looked into it, they should certainly have it on their first-quarter To-Do list.

As 2020 progresses we will see more and more companies taking advantage of the data-intensive technologies that will help them craft meaningful customer journeys, via the most appropriate channels. Getting it right won't always be easy though, and it's while crafting the strategy, that marketing leaders most often need the help of a great digital expert.

ABOUT TICHAONA SAVANHU

Tichaona (Tich) Savanhu is the Head of Digital Strategy with over 11 years of experience in digital advertising.
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