

Data, skill set and our relationship with technology

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

20 Mar 2020

Roan Mackintosh, MD at Incubeta recently spoke at the Cape Town and Johannesburg IAB Insight sessions on the trends that are transforming the digital economy and the future of work.

The Cape Town event was held at Kantar on the Foreshore on Thursday, 13 February and the Johannesburg session was held at MultiChoice City on Friday, 28 February. Both sponsored by Incubeta, in partnership with Kantar, DSTV Media Sales, GetSmarter, a 2U, Inc. brand and Bizcommunity.

Other members of the panel discussion included: Nkanyezi Masango (King James Group - Cape Town), Monique Claassen (Kantar - Cape Town and Johannesburg), Matt Wilke (24.com - Cape Town), Emma Carpenter, (Fjord - Johannesburg) and Zubeida Goolam (Brandtruth/DGTL - Johannesburg).

Here, Mackintosh delves into the trends transforming the digital economy and tells us what to watch out for in 2020. He goes into everything from the impending ban on third party cookies and the impact this could have on our ability as digital marketers to find, engage and track consumers and the importance of skill set. He believes organisations need to adopt a completely new way of viewing the marketing department and facilitate cross-functional collaboration, that our relationship with technology is something we need to get right and that there will always be place for the human element.



#Newsmaker: Roan Mackintosh is Incubeta SA's new MD

Juanita Pienaar 1 Oct 2019



■ The digital economy is changing at such a rapid rate. What are some of the trends transforming the digital economy at the moment?

So, for me the things I am hearing the most in the marketplace are around two main themes – data and skills. Let me briefly unpack each:

Firstly, I think everyone will have heard, in some shape or form, a cutesy analogy of a crumbling cookie and where this leaves us as digital marketers.



#BizTrends2020: End of an era as the 3rd party cookie crumbles

Lisa Macleod 14 Jan 2020



For anyone living under a rock, this refers to the impending ban on third party cookies. Spurred by privacy legislation, such as the GDPR, or similarly POPI locally, and more recently the California Consumer Privacy Act, most browsers like Safari, Mozilla and most recently Chrome have vowed to phase out third party cookies by 2022.

This has a profound impact on our ability as digital marketers to find, engage and track consumers.

So, while big data has been a trend for a while now, it's all becoming a little more real for marketers who are having to seriously interrogate their ability to gather and activate first party data as they can no longer rely on the Experian's of the world to do this data wrangling for them.

With talks of a global Google walled garden and more alarmist analogies to dark marketing, this is a hot topic to stay abreast of.

Don't believe all the hype. There will be a solution before the cut off. Although at the moment there are a few competing theories floating around on exactly how this will be done, but little consensus.

It also raises a scary commercial question for some marketers that recently invested in DMP technology, as this could realistically be a death knell for DMPs.

Secondly, and somewhat related, is the question of skill set. With not only changing privacy legislation, but also rapidly changing technological capabilities, skill sets are a hot topic. How do I staff my marketing team to succeed in a world of AI? Should I be employing a data scientist? What exactly does a data scientist do? And what's the difference between a data scientist, data analyst and data engineer?

All makes for particularly turbulent waters for those transacting in the digital economy to try and navigate.

■ ***Why do you believe being aware of and embracing these trends is important for business?***

Well, I think it should be fairly obvious that if marketers don't understand data (how to collect it, how to process it and how to activate it), then they are losing a serious competitive advantage. Essentially, going out blind into a digital marketplace with one-eyed giants (and even a select few with 20-20 vision). And perhaps it was a bit of a cop out to refer to skills as a trend, as that will always be relevant across industries. But, specifically within the digital economy, these skills are not only

very hard to find but are also quite nascent and, therefore, sometimes quite hard to even define.

We ourselves, as digital marketing experts, struggle to find the right mix of people to fulfill on a shifting technology landscape. People are being forced to evolve their roles every year (or even every six months) to adapt to the impact that machine learning and algorithms are having on functions.

For example, campaign managers of 2018 were loading and managing ads into advertising platforms, such as Google and Facebook. In 2019, these same people are now termed traders because of the real-time bidding nature of much of the advertising that is being purchased and managed today.

In a year or two, I see these roles rendered near-obsolete through algorithms, and the people managing these campaigns will need to be far more strategic and statistically capable in order to make the right decisions on where and how campaigns should be activated. That's a massive shift and that's just one of the roles we are talking about here.

■ *How should businesses respond / change the way they approach interactive marketing?*

When I think of interactive advertising, I think of advertising that adapts to specific user cues. So, things like Dynamic Product Ads in Facebook where ads are basically templatised and then generated on the fly based on various data points of the users viewing them at the time.

So, not only do you need to have audience data sorted, but you also have to have your product feed sorted so that you can ingest the right product price and image into the ad to make the purchase opportunity consistent and more immediate.

Similarly, dynamically sequenced creative allows marketers to tell a story to a specific audience segment over consecutive interactions that don't necessarily have to all occur in the same platform/digital environment or even at the same time. Much like when you drive down the highway and see a sequence of billboards with messaging that leads one to another.

Digitally, you can target users according to their profile, but also follow them across the web (across highways) to sequentially continue the conversation. There is of course the sexier side to things too, such as an [emerging format Alexa ad](#) that actually invites users to interact with the ad itself in non-traditional ways (in this instance voice activation).

■ *How should businesses respond / change the way they approach interactive marketing?*

I'll be pointed and say that most businesses don't just need a change, they need a revolution. And I'm not saying that employees need to raise arms and overthrow the establishment! What I am saying though is that simply making a few tweaks or getting a single "digital specialist" into the team isn't going to help. Organisations need to adopt a completely new way of viewing the marketing department within the organisation and need to facilitate cross-functional collaboration.

I've said it before, that as we move to bringing the customer to the centre of the business, the marketing department (as one of the primary contact points for customers) needs to move closer to the centre of the business too. Establishment of a cross-functional Centre of Excellence (COE) would be one way to address the need to collaboratively solve problems that will arise from breaking down the traditional product silos that exist within many organisations currently. The COE also caters for how to engage with external partners (creative, technology, etc.) and establish ways of working that facilitates a far more adaptive rather than reactive approach to marketing.

■ *And then in terms of future trends, what do you foresee happening in the digital economy/industry in 2020? What to watch out for in 2020.*

Data is going to be a key focus in 2020, specifically, how you structure your teams (or bring in specialist help) to get to grips with capturing, processing and activating data. Creative is also going to be interesting to watch, from dynamic executions to new immersive formats. I think there is a lot that can be done if you have the right data.

At the moment ads are being streamed into Sky's set top boxes that are essentially digital into terrestrial TV, targeted to

specific households and I think we would all be hard pressed to identify ads that are part of traditional TV broadcast and those that have been digitally inserted. How long before technologies such as deep fakes have Morgan Freeman talking to you (and listening to and responding to your questions) about your insurance?

■ **What does the future of work look like to you?**

I've actually been doing a fair bit of reading on the future of work recently. Primarily out of self-interest. So, while I must say that things like a four-day work week that Finland is looking to make mandatory does certainly appeal, I think more important to get right will be our relationship with technology.

Forgive me for getting a little esoteric, but I think we've got a real risk of losing ourselves in technology. The idea of digital minimalism really appeals to me in this sense. Where we don't see our mobile phones as a constant companion to banish boredom, but rather see it as utilitarian.

Interestingly, Steve Jobs' keynote address at the launch of the iPhone was primarily around it being an iPod that could make calls. The simplicity of combining two things that people did regularly in one device - the epitome of minimalism. Only after 30 minutes did he start talking about apps and at the time he certainly wasn't envisaging this being an open marketplace for third party apps. He actually thought these would crash the phone when someone needed to dial 911.

“ A phone should be there to serve a purpose and should only be engaged with when it is adding value. And to me, randomly scrolling through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter feeds is not adding value. It might be tapping into a deeper sociological construct in terms of needing to be validated (and that is a whole different debate on how big technology companies are knowingly exploiting users for financial gain) but most will agree that the phone is currently robbing us of our ability to be productive and focus on critical thought. ”

So the obvious risk that people raise in the future of work is that "the machines are taking over" and there will be massive job losses. While that may be true for some of the more menial tasks, I think there will always be place for the human element. And although the world will likely be run by algorithms, those algorithms still need to be understood, programmed and applied by people. Technology is no doubt going to have a huge impact on the way we work in the future.

“ For me the risk is less about how much technology takes away from a task perspective and more about how much it takes away from our humanity. ”

For more insights, here's our coverage of the Cape Town and Johannesburg sessions:



#IABInsightSeries: Trends transforming the digital economy (CPT)

Jessica Tennant 20 Mar 2020



#IABInsightSeries: Trends transforming the digital economy (JHB)

Jessica Tennant 23 Mar 2020



The Series has temporarily been postponed.

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