

Attention is the new currency in adland

 By [Edward Herridge](#)

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Advertising has piggybacked on technology since the 17th century and in our modern world has evolved to a pervasive presence in the daily lives of people across the globe. A little bit too pervasive some would say, and evidence would back them up if one considers YouTube Premium's main selling point, the absence of advertisements, as evidence.

Think about this for a moment. Consumers would pay money not to be advertised to.

So what happens when consumers decide that they are fed up with being advertised at? Once again, I turn to YouTube for an example. With the advent of YouTube Premium consumers were offered access to the platform ad free. Being employed in the advertising industry, I approached the proposition like a drug dealer. Since I don't use my own product, I just test it for quality, I too subscribed to unsubscribe from ads.

[via GIPHY](#)

I have not looked back since and the thrill of surfing my favourite channels without five-second speed bumps to slow me down is invigorating. Naturally the market adapted, and I now find myself subjected to the most honest snake oil sales I have ever experienced, channel sponsorship.

At first, it was a bit cringy when the YouTubers awkwardly presented their supplemental sources of income, but this passed once I accepted the convention with the caveat that I could just fast-forward. The product showcases were also done with such a lack of guile that I could forgive them the imposition. As time went by the savvy operators adapted and integrated

their sponsors seamlessly into their presentation, a feat easily achieved by tech and review channels. This format does not, however, leave space for what is generally considered to be “traditional” advertising.

At this point, we must ask what is to become of the TV ad, once the pinnacle of industry creative output?

Funny you should ask.



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Undersized digital real estate

Online advertising is a minefield of undersized digital real estate and limited time windows. These portals do not lend themselves to the tour-de-force of the full-length feature ad that traditional television advertising had once leveraged consumer interest with. The not-so-new media's limitations led to the trend of advertisers pushing for their ads to trend, with the holy grail of meme status being the ultimate goal.

For a while advertising became a rapid fire of quips and clever tricks. Brevity was the name of the game. The problem with this approach is that once everybody had aligned with the medium in this manner it became saturated and homogenous.

There is also a dark side to trends. They are fickle, uncontrollable and memes are unpredictable. A meme is a wild horse. It is especially prone to throwing its source's original messaging by wildly bucking in all directions. The outcome of this is almost never a pleasant one and many a brand has been left trampled and bruised by the outcome.

To briefly continue the equus narrative I am going to trot out the old donkey of anecdotal wisdom. The one that transforms into an anecdotal sage and wisely rubs his beard while peering deeply into your eyes as it mouths “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

As much as the Instagram's, Facebooks and YouTubes of the world would like you to believe, the granddaddy of advertising, the full-length feature ad, is far from dead. It's alive, virile and kicking and got itself a young wife to prove it. It did take him a while to get used to her short attention span and phone addiction, but through patience and perseverance old man media has managed to get new media to pause and appreciate some finer things in life that he could offer her.

Fear of new media

In the beginning the whole media family feared that new media would kill old media, that it was just after the money. But old man media was a tough old bastard who refused to believe that his glory days were over and took to the challenge with vigour and vitality.

Eventually new media did take a lot of money from old media, but in time she also grew to appreciate and respect his experience and wit. Against all odds, the pairing worked. She was however not interested in his rambling tales of the good old days. She had other more youthful interests.

One thing he had going for him was that he could be considered a funny old codger. On occasion, he could make her laugh. He loved doing this because, when successful, she would look up from her phone with her face lit up, beautiful, young and filled with potential. At such times he would have her attention just long enough to feel noticed and appreciated. The union produced an offspring that combined the best of both worlds, and they named it Grey Media.

I should at this point be evident that the finely crafted and considered humour that a traditional advertising campaign can

offer, and leverage, should still be considered an attractive proposition. Funny, really funny, can get you that valuable moment of opportunity that a brand needs to be seen.

One agency that has chomped down on this particular learning, and because they are a funny bunch of people anyway, is Grey South Africa. They love to make funny stuff. It makes business sense. They did not have to jump onto a bandwagon as much as swap their mode of transport for a more modern form of conveyance.

I have observed this creative agency in their natural habitat and this, surprisingly, seems to be what they really love doing. But they do go about it in a very funny way sometimes. You can figure this out for yourself by [checking out what they have produced for Savanna](#) over the past few months.

A great example of further return on their humorous approach is how they treated the latest cautionary PSA ads Distell flighted on drinking and driving. These are never an easy sell and risk being perceived as preachy and worse, counter brand.

By using known local comedians to not be funny, they hit the spot just right to deliver the message perfectly.

These PSA's were organically transitioned from Savannas Comedy Bar, an initiative the agency launched when the Covid-19 pandemic hit SA. Both the PSA ads and Comedy Bar initiative serve as indication on how Grey SA deploys good humour to benefits the brands that they represent. By offering consumers a chuckle or two during difficult times and awkward conversations in exchange for their attention created a win-win situation.

In conclusion, if we expect consumers to pay us any attention, we should offer them something in return. It's a simple transaction. Dale Carnegie would have expressed it as I'm OK, and You're OK. Entertainment is the currency we as advertisers used to purchase this valuable commodity from consumers. Comedy, in the guise of considered humour, is probably the most universally accepted and valuable currency in this marketplace. It is not a fluke that a single high-profile comedian can fill a theatre to capacity with as little as a mike and some good jokes.

ABOUT EDWARD HERRIDGE

Edward matriculated in 1992 after which he performed military service and began his working career in printing by studying electronic origination at the South African Printing College. Edward eventually became an account executive for Oakes and Associates at Investec Bank. He then migrated into advertising and became brand manager for Ronin Grain Management Solutions. Edward departed Ronin GMS to pursue his own interest before finding employment at Grey advertising as a finishing artist, re-toucher, motion graphic and digital designer.

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