

What's taught in lecture rooms should match the real world

 By [Khangelani Dziba](#)

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I have often sat in the office listening to the many insightful conversations we have about the PR industry and developments within. And then I wonder; to what extent does what is taught in the lecture rooms to students of the late 2000s really match what their actual experience in the world of work is.



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I know this might be a different set of circumstance for mathematics and science students as they are ever so often required to tap into that textbook knowledge they have acquired, because they would not be able to navigate their way through outside of referencing it. But for many PR students, do they really extract value from the course work at varsity or is it a complete waste when they are introduced to the world of work?

I was having a deep, meaningful conversation with a friend of mine recently who seemed to think, based on the argument I had made on the changes taking place in the PR space, that there was absolutely no need for subjects like PR. And that rather, they should become a broader part of the Marketing & Communications subject.

"If these are the insights that are not part of the content being taught at school, then I have a fundamental problem," he said. I obviously disagreed because I do believe that there is space for PR and also believe that the subject is a crucial part of the Marketing & Brand Communications matrix. However, we cannot run away from the changes that it is experiencing and the practice needs to evolve with the times.

Earned, shared and paid media

Earned, shared and paid media are terms that are often used in the industry to describe the kind of coverage clients can get. But do those graduating from varsity truly know grasp the meaning of these and how to utilise them to their best advantage. Do they really know that earned and paid media are the parameters we are working in and how they should be distributed? These are insights that should be shared not only in the boardrooms but also in the lecture rooms so that students know exactly what to expect.

In extension to this, most students would be able to experience this kind of environment and knowledge through vocational experiences but the truth is, there are not enough agencies to be able to take up the scores of students who, come April – June, come knocking on heavily laden doors of agencies. This obviously highlights a need that sadly, cannot be ignored.

I work with some of the most brilliant minds who often always seem to get it because what we do is such an intrinsic part of their DNA. Excuse the pun, but it really is true. The time that is spent mentoring and coaching the talent under our DNA Brand Architects is truly valuable and has brought some of the most amazing minds that takeover boardrooms. But this is not the case for every student and perhaps the conversation we should be having now, is how do we address this?

For me, there are four key areas we would need to focus on, namely:

Reassessment of curriculum: This is key in determining whether or not the theory and coursework being taught to students is relevant for the South African market and perhaps where are the areas that need to be dialled up to ensure that students leave the varsity setting wholesome and ready to take on the world of work. There is no use continuing with outdated approaches that will not aid students in their path to success. Sure, there are fundamentals that cannot be skipped in the process like the 4 Ps of marketing but there are new tricks learnt along the way that should and need to be incorporated.

Industry expert lectures and assignments: To ensure that there is an alignment and appreciation of what is happening on the ground, students would greatly benefit from industry experts who have a wealth of knowledge that is balanced with empirical research lecturing them on key insights that they would need when entering into the job market. Case in point, the utilisation of influencers as advocates of brands. And the now urgent need for the reassessment on how earned and paid media work collectively in the current environment.

Opening up of the industry: Truthfully, if we have enough skilled experts in our organisations who have the know how, then it should be tasked upon us to at least have students coming in quarterly for vocational work. How are they ever going to complete their studies and have industry knowledge if it is twice as hard to get into our spaces to learn?

Encouraging young (black) entrepreneurship: If the opportunities are not enough in agencies and companies we operate in, we have to encourage business ownerships that are mentored by those who have the know how so as to enable the many generations to come with an opportunity to carry on the baton. But most importantly tell the South African story.

It is not as simple, no, to address these very real issues but we have to make strides, strides towards bettering their lived experiences by acting as guides that will lead them to a place of prosperity.

ABOUT KHANGELANI DZIBA

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