

On social ills, margins and marketing effectiveness

By [Mathe Okaba](#)

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There are three distinct areas that will to some extent continue shaping and moulding our profession and the broader marketing and communications industry in 2020 and beyond.



Mathe Okaba, CEO of the ACA.

These are not necessarily trends, because trends are not subjected to the definition of a 12-month calendar year, starting in January and ending in December.

“ Rather, they are factors that will be talking points, moulding elements and guiding lights in marketing and communication in the immediate future, with some extending to the medium-term and beyond. ”

We can group them into three broad areas, namely – societal issues; industry-specific financial realities; and validating our existence and value addition.

Now don't get me wrong, there are a multitude of issues, areas, activities and instances of sheer brilliance related to the advertising profession that are important, which are charging unapologetically into uncharted territory.

The trend of trends

Jacques du Bruyn 8 Mar 2019





And lest we forget that chasm that exists between fads and evergreen truths.

A decade ago, [trends for 2010](#) included social media, growth of video, AR and VR, integrated communications, transparency, trust, less interruption, more engagement. The list goes on.

Today, many still refer to these as trends. Ten years ago, thought leaders were discussing gender imbalance across the board, mental health issues in the creative industries, sexualised depiction of women in campaigns, addressing talent issues and on and on it went. And? Has this changed?

So, let's rather look at three key realities in the South African context that will either continue haunting us, help direct us, further endear us with clients, or possibly just be refreshed stepping stones on the path to continually formulating and delivering incredible strategic and creative work for the brands that entrust us with their assets...

Societal: GBV and xenophobia

These are societal issues, or rather societal ills that affect every single one of us. They affect our relationships, our perceptions, our mental state and, to an extent, our day-to-day lives. As a nation and as a profession, it is imperative that we play our part in altering the daily discourse around the why, the where and the when.

We need to change our actions, from slacktivism to something more effective.



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Leigh Andrews 24 Jul 2017



These are real issues we face on a daily basis, and as an industry, as professionals working within it, we need to be the spark that sets the motor of a new set of actions in motion.

We are quick to lay claim to our ability to create and sway public opinion. We claim to be able to drive public temperament, create and entrench societal norms. It is our collective effort that results in luxuries becoming necessities, creating demand where there was none, all the while boosting consumerism.

The question we should be asking ourselves, or rather addressing, is, 'What are we doing about gender-based violence

(and by extension gender inequality) and xenophobia?'



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Leigh Andrews 2 Dec 2019



How can we use our knowledge and our abilities and combine them, possibly with our client buy-in, to change perception? How do we play our part in altering the course of gender inequality and its ills, while building a truly united South Africa?

Industry-specific financial realities: Margins

Margins have always been a talking point for any business, not just within advertising. Many agencies are facing shrinking margins and extended payment terms, a result possibly of the global financial environment, which as we all know, has seen better days. Much better!



#Budget2019: The aloe in the room

Mathe Okaba 5 Mar 2019



As long as advertising is seen as a cost centre for brands, clients extend payment terms, 'in-house' work that should be the domain of our profession continues and the ACA Code of Conduct is flouted, margins will continue to come under pressure.

We cannot combat all the changes and developments, but those that we can counter should be done in a coordinated fashion – with one industry voice. There is strength in numbers.

Validating our existence and value addition: Marketing effectiveness

There can be no greater weapon in an industry's arsenal than that of proving its reason for being.

“ We exist not only to create pretty pictures, emotive stories and powerful pay off lines, but more so, to provide communications solutions to a business objective or problem. This is our currency. ”

Our ability to deliver campaigns that shift the needle for brands and deliver effective return on investment should be the number one objective in any agency.

It is immaterial whether we use the latest social media platform, activation, radio or word of mouth, or employ programmatic and Blockchain, or the latest bubbling-under method to engage consumers to do this. The key ultimately, is the output, not the method.

2020 will see the first Effie Awards South Africa programme take place.



Effie Awards South Africa launched by ACA

9 Dec 2019



There will be no better time to prove the value of the work that agencies create. This global marketing effectiveness awards programme honours the one truly significant achievement in advertising and marketing communications – results.

It places South African work in the company of the most effective campaigns worldwide and reflects on the competency of our industry.

“ What it really does, if it should be reduced to its most basic explanation, is that it proves to clients that we are partners and not merely service providers. ”

So, 2020 will be what we make it, not what it does for us. It's time that we strategise to solve our own industry problems, build brand 'adland' to our own benefit, and give back and drive consumer perception, as a consolidated voice around societal issues which affect all of us.

ABOUT MATHE OKABA

Mathe Okaba is the CEO of the Association for Communication and Advertising (ACA). She is a consummate business professional and entrepreneur with over 23 years' experience spanning the advertising, media, sponsorship and events industries. With a passion for strategy, planning and project management, she has built a solid reputation as a successful leader and team player...

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