

IAB Insight Series: These are the trends transforming the digital economy

By  Juanita Pienaar

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The IAB Insight Series, in partnership with Meltwater, the Radisson Hotel Group and *Bizcommunity*, held their second event in the series of The Future of Work, where a panel of experts in the field shared insights on trends transforming the digital economy.



From l-r: Michelle Beh, MD The Jupiter Drawing Room Cape Town, Basil Fortuin, digital publisher for 24.com/ Media 24, Adhil Patel, global director at Kantar TNS, Kelly Driscoll, Sanlam Digital Group digital marketing and social media manager, Karin du Chenne, CEO South Africa, Insights Kantar TNS and Lotang Mokoena, a strategist from VML. © [IAB Twitter](#).

#BizTrends2019 contributor Michelle Beh, MD The Jupiter Drawing Room Cape Town, presented her predictions [published on Bizcommunity](#) earlier this year.



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Beh also moderated the panel discussion that included Lotang Mokoena, a strategist from VML and [Future Fit Top 3 under 30](#); Karin du Chenne, the CEO South Africa, Insights Kantar TNS; Adhil Patel, global director at Kantar TNS; Kelly Driscoll, Sanlam Digital Group digital marketing and social media manager; and Basil Fortuin, digital publisher for 24.com's Media24. Here are a few of the highlights from that discussion.

Digital trends that stand out

Beh asked the panel to pick one trend that will have the most impact on themselves, their businesses or their clients. Mokoena kicked off the discussion by saying that she thinks a lot of agencies look at millennials as the benchmark in terms of where brands should go. "However, the millennials are becoming the middle child," Mokoena said.

"This is because the generation before them had a certain way of how life should be and the generation coming after them is very disruptive. Millennials are trying to look for a space between their big sister who knew where she was going and their little sister, who is just this wild cat and they are trying to figure out, so where do we stand? Where's my voice?"

She thinks a lot of people look at millennials and think that they're an angry bunch. But they're actually not. "We're ageing and at this level, we are only now figuring out who we are. We need to look at these millennials and look at how they are interpreting things because they are the ones that are front-running with 'woke Twitter', for example, but we need to understand what stems this woke Twitter. We don't have to act on everything that they are saying because they are angry. We need to be able to understand their anger and move on as brands," she said.

Next up was Du Chenne who said that the rise of AI and how it affects each one of us and how it can improve what we do each day, is a big trend that the team at Kantar has identified. "I really think that AI can improve the future of work, so we (the humans) can rather focus on really connecting with consumers and understanding all this big data in a more meaningful way and so we can just be focussed on the real stuff, the human stuff and using our special quality, which is human understanding."



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Driscoll said that from her perspective, being in a big organisation, the trend that is most relevant is client centricity. "In Sanlam, there must be six or seven standalone marketing teams, so that's generating piles of data and it's all very siloed. So more and more we are starting to realise the single view of the customer and how important that is. And we're building teams around it. Directors are going overseas all the time to find the best tools to manage it and changing all our systems."

Patel agreed with both Driscoll and Du Chenne and said that machine learning and AI are quite important trends in the insights area. Combined with the customer centricity point, those things come together. Because it's no longer enough to just have data.

"We have loads and loads of data - big data is no longer just a buzzword, it's actually a reality for most of us, but the idea is that just getting the data is not enough. We've got to be able to interpret that. Machine learning has a big role to play in that and also being more consumer-focused. So, focus on what this means for people," he said.



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Commenting on AI and how it is interconnected with big data, Fortuin said that we sometimes make the mistake of thinking of AI and big data independently and that they are, in fact, two things that function separately but in reality, the one is very

much dependent on the other. "Because your AI can't write those beautiful algorithms and those predictive models if you don't feed it constantly with enough data and the right amount of data. So, I think we must be cognisant of the fact that those two go together."

Fortuin said due to his background in print, when he worked in magazines, experiential marketing was a big thing. And it's something that magazines over the years have done very well. Now from a digital space, it's something that advertisers and brands need to look at.

"Because I think it's going to become a thing where we can create experiential marketing or experiences within a digital space without expecting anything from the consumer - not expecting the consumer to buy a ticket, to buy some merchandise but purely creating experiences within a digital space that allows consumers to go and share on social with their friends about the experience and how great it was."

These are exciting times

Next, Beh asked the panel to tell us what they think is the most interesting and exciting about the digital economy at the moment – something that makes them want to go to work in the morning.

Fortuin said it's the idea that at some point, the business has to help brands and agencies to be able to put a personalised ad in front of the customer, at the right time and at the right place. "Because we have the audience data, we are investing in the AI, stepping up and accelerating the process so that we can get to that point where we can actually deliver on this and that excites me. Ultimately for me, it's about thinking about how we can help brands and agencies better talk to our audience, which is also your customer."

In a related way, Patel said he has been excited for many years now about understanding why people do what they do. "When it comes to the digital economy, one thing that frustrates the hell out of me is that we haven't got it right yet. People don't understand the behaviours that are going on," he said.

"People often point to a company like Netflix as having worked so hard on their machine learning and their recommendation, but a show of hands of who thinks that Netflix is actually doing a good job of pointing out things you'd really enjoy to watch reveals that they don't. How can they not get it right yet? For me, I am excited about a time when targeting actually is correct. When I get the right recommendation at the right time."



Leading disruption

Kantar 28 Nov 2018



He went on to explain that people often get irritated about adverts that come up in their feeds, but they actually get irritated when it's the wrong ads that come up. Whereas people will get excited when it's the right thing, because they think, 'They know me, they understand me, they know what I need.'

“ For me, that is what drives me, when it comes to insights it's about targeting the right people, understanding people in a way that nobody else understands them. You're not going to be able to do that by just looking at what people are doing, you need to understand how people think and how they feel. ”

Driscoll agreed with this and said that from a brand perspective, it's the data signals and learning and truly being able to understand what clients want.

So no longer are we pushing products and trying to sell things that are going to bump up the bottom line, but we're actually understanding what clients need and these data signals that we're getting across digital platforms actually help us inform

product development.

She said: “We are developing products that people actually need and ultimately we are adding real value to their lives. I think I'm excited to help people be more financially resilient, from my perspective.”

Du Chenne added that from a business perspective, she is very excited about chatbots and conversational AI, making the task of understanding what people want from their products, how they want to refine their services, how they want Netflix to understand what they need and want each day.

“ [@karinduchenne](#) CEO Insights [@Kantar](#) is excited about how digital platforms, including chatbots, can increase our ability as marketers and researchers to better understand what our customers need and want in an easier and faster way - without losing the insights [#KantarFutures](#) [pic.twitter.com/aWJOJWnzj](#)— IAB South Africa (@iab_sa) [February 22, 2019](#) ”

“The other thing [to consider] is where and how we connect data. We find such willingness for people to engage when we do it better. I am excited when marketing and insights and media come together for targeting, for better attraction to surveys and for better engagement in the way we do surveys,” she said.

Mokoena said she's excited about how marketers disrupt the algorithm. "How do we feed people information that they don't know they need yet? As marketers, we need to be able to feed people information in an interesting way that will make them engage with it and be interested to find out more."

South Africa faces these barriers...

Beh then asked the panel to discuss the barriers keeping South Africa transforming into a big digital economy.

Mokoena said that one of the major barriers is probably fear. “I think as a country, we are afraid of change. So, when new technologies come into play, we are scared of how it's going to change the environment and how it's going to disrupt and how it's going to take away from what you've been given.”

She said that people might think, ‘I'm going to lose my job,’ or ‘it's going to take me away from the position where I'm at,’ but it's not necessarily going to do that. “We must allow digital to come in and transform us,” she said.

Fortuin said for business, it also comes down to the people that are leading the businesses. How digitally transformed are the CEOs of the big corporates in South Africa? And how much of that digital transformation conversation are they driving?

“There are a few guys, like Michael Jordaan and what he did with FNB, but imagine if every major South African company had a Michael Jordaan at the head of their business,” he said. “Think about how quickly the acceleration of digital transformation within South African businesses would have happened.”



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He said that a lot of that transformation is pawned off to the IT manager or to the CIO or the CTO, and it becomes somebody's responsibility over there to take care of the company's digital transformation. Because the CEO is too busy running the business, so let the IT manager take care of that.

Fortuin says that attitude needs to stop.

“ As much as you need the expertise of a certain type of individual to drive it, our corporate leaders should take the initiative and take the first steps in transforming business digitally, because that will flow down to the customer and CX and what we ultimately give them. ”

Du Chenne said that for her, one of the biggest challenges in SA is scarce skills. She said her company is investing hugely in AI, new tools and systems and processes but there are simply not enough graduates coming out with the relevant skills to fill our data academies.



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“So, there is no point in spending all this money on the infrastructure and then not having enough people to interpret what data is telling you. So yes, it is from the top down but also in acknowledging that there is this massive skills shortage where we need it.”

Beh also commented and said that before she came to Cape Town, she joined a huge insurance company in South-East Asia. It was exciting because the board hired a CMO to be the CEO for the first time, because they released that they had to change the business. She said the end result is therefore not about the products, it's about the connection to the customers.

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ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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