

To converge or not to converge - this is no longer the question - it's the state of play!

 By [Dawn Rowlands](#)

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The biggest effect of the digital revolution is the removal of any degrees of separation between the consumer and anything out in the marketplace. Whatever consumers wish to access or get information on is now just a click away - be it on a mobile device or a personal computer. This has and will continue to have profound and cataclysmic effects on almost every existing industry, and none more so than the advertising industry.

As media converges online, the distinctions between various forms of advertising will disappear. Branding - direct, electronic and print - will all become part of one seamless marketing continuum online and for many brands and agencies it already has.

What is convergence and how will brands benefit from it?

Before we get there let's ask the following first? What is it you want to communicate to your audience and what do you want to achieve out of this communication? Have you set clear objectives as to what you want to communicate? Do you understand your consumer and their habits and how they like to engage and when?

This is the most important part of your strategy and if you don't get this right, then what is the point of executing a marketing plan.

At this early stage of the marketing plan you need everyone that is going to be involved in the execution of the plan in one room - not just the above the line agency who are often left to come up with the Big Idea - you need the entire creative team, the digital team, the social media team, the media buyers, the out of home. A quick poll within the industry (from all sectors - media buying, digital, search, creative, strategy, out of home) asked some key industry influencers what they thought convergence is and how brands could benefit from it - the insights are interesting to say the least.

"Media convergence is the merging of mass communication outlets - print, television, radio, the Internet along with portable and interactive technologies through various digital media platforms. It allows mass media professionals to tell stories and present information and entertainment using a variety of media. Converged communication provides multiple tools for storytelling, allowing consumers to select level of interactivity while self-directing content delivery." Karen Phelan, managing director, Full Circle Media

"Firstly I think this term maybe misinterpreted or it can mean more than one thing. For me convergence is a first and foremost a technology phenomenon. Technically convergence means the shift over from analogue to digital, the more

hardware and broadcast media that make this shift (resulting in more sharing, interaction of info/data/content on a common platform) the more convergence becomes a reality.

"Subsequently trend experts have coined convergence to be what consumers then do as a result to the technical convergence. By this I mean how consumers seamlessly share content and data across multiple devices on a common platform. Brands who understand this intuitive consumer experience, can become part of these interactions as they make it easier for consumers to allow them into the conversation." Richard Procter, director, Vizeum South Africa

"We have seen media fragmentation because of new digital platforms. In a nutshell convergence is the "coming together" of media forms and brands will benefit from this if they have a consistent message and campaign across the platforms, therefore the buzz phrase at the moment is integrated campaign." Danette Breitenbach, editor, *Advantage Magazine*.

"Brands will benefit enormously because they will no longer have to gamble on choosing the right medium at the right time to get to the right target market but will simply have to ensure that they have absolutely everything about their brand that the consumer could possibly want, ready and available to be called up as easily as possible when consumers "demand" information. This will include product details, background videos of the manufacturing process and usage, distributors, retail outlets, online shopping options etc. This will not replace conventional brand and retail advertising but will become a growing trend - information on demand." Chris Moerdyk, marketing analyst.

"Convergence is the idea that many different media touch points are changing functionality and becoming more diverse, and at the same time many media formats are coming together in new and exciting ways. This change in functionality is also allowing changes in how the different media types can work together. Mobile and out-of-home, for example, can now work incredibly effectively together. With geographic information available on mobiles, the handset is now a great out-of-home medium, which can be used very effectively with existing out-of-home inventory (for example, near-field communication, which is yet to launch properly in South Africa, allows direct interaction between out-of-home sites and handsets). Likewise, radio and out-of-home work very effectively together as they offer different creative elements (audio and visual respectively) at the same time. Erik Warburg, managing director, Posterscope

"Convergence is the advance of technology that enables progressively less devices to solve progressively more human problems more immediately, and more seamlessly with real life. This means that the way that the consumer interacts with media has changed.

"The what, where, when, how and on whose terms is now, more than ever, in the hands of the consumer - literally. Mobile connectivity (aka sharing) and digitisation present the two largest opportunities for OOH. It has broadened the scope of OOH's ability to influence consumer behaviour. By affecting the consumer's real world, OOH can influence digital behaviour via mobile. With every consumer now connected to the rest of the world by the mobile device in their hands, a small scale experience locally can very quickly lead to massive user generated exposure on a global scale via the web. The medium is now also ready to drive mobile e-commerce. The digitisation and, more importantly, networking of OOH media will continue to erode historical barriers to entry (e.g. printing costs) and pitfalls of the medium (long change of message lead times, limited scope for interaction). This means that highly targeted, large scale campaigns can now be quickly implemented with 21st century accountability and measurability." Bruce Burgess, Out of Home, manager Africa, Posterscope

The converged agency

The question that begs answering is what are agencies doing about taking on an integrated approach, or do they still believe that they can exist as standalone entities focusing on one specific area of expertise?

The consumer market is that of instant demand and fulfilment, where online acts as the connection between the consumer's needs and the merchant's ability to meet them. It is almost a no-brainer that advertising agencies should already have adapted the way in which they do things. If they sit back and wait for their clients to come to them and demand that they have all their marketing and advertising completely integrated through all the mediums, they are in danger of self-annihilation.

As the head of Aegis Media in Sub-Saharan Africa we have spent the past 24 months ensuring that all our network brands are perfectly poised to offer a completely converged approach to our vast client base, but it all started with the simple principle of.....What is your clients ultimate objective and how do we take them there!

ABOUT DAWN ROWLANDS

Dawn Rowlands is the CEO Dentsu Aegis Network SSA. She has over 20 years of experience in the media industry and has most notably been a shareholder founding partner of Nota Bene, a strategy agency in South Africa, and is also the founder of Posterscope SA. Contact Dawn on dawn.rowlands@aemedia.com

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