

Multicultural marketing and activations - the African context



By Vaughan Berry, issued by Proantage

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We talk about the 'rainbow nation'. One in which everyone is considered to be part of one big 'melting pot'. We talk about being 'African'. And again this indicates a type of 'one-ness' that paints everyone in Africa with the same brush. This is true in so many ways, however when it comes to engaging with consumers, it may not be so, and is not that clear cut.



Africa is a continent composed of a multitude of nations. One which consists of a multitude of cultures, languages, religions and traditions. While many marketers plan and execute campaigns on this basis, there are still many that fall back on the one-size-fits-all plan; with the belief that what works in South Africa (which in itself requires qualification) will work in Mozambique, Kenya, Nigeria or Rwanda, or any other African state for that matter. If we drill down further to campaign-specific elements, it becomes even more critical in understanding the market when developing an activation campaign. Understanding these multicultural markets is critical, as is partnering with the correct agency in each territory.

Multicultural marketing, as is widely accepted, is defined as targeting and communicating to consumers based on their diverse cultural attributes. In turn, culture is defined as the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society. The opportunity cost of not creating a multicultural marketing strategy within the African context can translate into losses for marketers. Messages could be misinterpreted, resulting in damage to the brand, or worse still, a loss of customers due to brand alienation or defection. Since Africa is so diverse, it is truly imperative that marketers understand the cultural, linguistic and religious nuances of the various territories when integrating 'local' activities into marketing tactics and strategies.

Once the African market is segmented into language, culture and religious attributes (all of which play a role in brand assimilation), it becomes necessary to add an additional layer. Where and when consumers shop, what they require or desire, and how the products make their way into the hands of consumers all have to be factored into the marketing plan. These shopping habits can change drastically from one country to the next. And as habits change, so does the way in which brands can most effectively engage with consumers within the purchasing environment.

For this reason, when planning activations within African markets, it is critical that a partner is selected that knows the market, understands its nuances and has depth of knowledge in terms of shopping behaviour. Activations play a key role in multiple touch point marketing, and understanding the marketplace is what truly makes them effective. A clear understanding of the targeted consumer is what results in effective implementation of a campaign that delivers relevance, ensuring an effective and memorable brand engagement.

For brands to receive the best possible return on their marketing spend, they need to ensure that their message is delivered 'loud and clear'. And in order to reduce time spent briefing, travelling and researching – costs drivers that are not ideal in developing economies – a single agency with knowledge across a multitude of African markets is ideal. The agency should be engaged upfront, when the campaign is devised, such that the brand can be advised and guided accordingly as to why a specific element within the activations campaign may or may not work across various territories. This prevents the possibilities of brand messaging being misinterpreted, with all the resultant detrimental effects to the brand.

When it comes to implementing brand campaigns in African countries, pick an agency who knows, who has a legacy of working within these countries, who can deliver and deliver well.

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