

Empowering digital marketing teams to meet 2021's challenges



By [Niamh NicLiam](#)

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The digital acceleration of the last two years, but most especially during 2020, has placed a growing focus on digital marketing delivery. And, while South Africa is incredibly well-placed to handle an agile response to whatever 2021 may throw at us, we will need to take a hard look at our skills deficit, as well as how brands work with their agencies, if we really want to excel in the year ahead.



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I take a look at how brands can manage a growing skills deficit, better partner with their agencies, and step up to the leadership challenge in 2021.

Overcoming the skills deficit

There is no doubt that surviving and thriving in 2021 will depend on agile responses to whatever the year may send our way. South Africans' responsive attitude and natural curiosity makes local brands ideally suited to embrace the rapid changes of the martech world.

However, one of the challenges for South African brands - especially those looking to follow in the global trend of in-housing - is the dearth of senior skills with the requisite experience in new digital technologies such as machine learning, AI or personalisation. This could be further exacerbated in 2021 as the cream of our skills crop could be snapped up by global companies as remote work becomes the norm.

Ultimately, in an age when technology is changing at such an accelerated pace, marketing leaders have to accept that they cannot expect their teams to master all the requisite skills. Work being done by organisations like the IAB Education Council, for example, is proving invaluable when it comes to addressing this challenge, but in the shorter term, one way for brands to address skills gaps is to work more closely with their agencies.

Re-imagine your agency relationships

In order to really benefit from the martech opportunity, a brand must first be in a position to imagine the possibilities. However, even this requires a certain skills level and many local companies will need to enable their teams to be able to have meaningful engagement with their agencies.

A large part of fixing the skills deficit lies with the agencies. They have a responsibility to help equip their clients so they are able to share in the journey of tech discovery.

The clients who are participating in enablement training programmes with us are seeing the benefits. The result of our work together is team members who are better able to understand the tech, as well as understanding the benefits of what it can do. This baseline knowledge transfer makes a significant impact on how brands engage with us as well as facilitating a productive two-way communication that enables fast, effective delivery.

Digital marketing now provides so much more than it did before. It's more than just about lower costs per sale or better click rates. Digital marketing now provides solutions as well as performance through automation and efficiency, which all come together to grow a client's business. This means that agencies really have to understand their client's business and where their pain points are. However, if there is no trust between client and agency there is no way that this will ever be delivered.

Empowered CMOs

The final key to building a resilient team which is able to respond to change lies with leadership. In order to properly address skills challenges local CMOs will have to take the bull by the horns.

Firstly, the increasingly blurred lines between the role of CMO and CTO or CIO when it comes to martech demands a better working relationship between the two.

Secondly, managing teams in the midst of the digital quantum leap we are living through will require a deep understanding of the power of (especially) platform technologies like GMP; building a team that is able to work closely with a trusted agency to get the most out of the available tech; and an ability to excite your C-Level execs with the opportunities offered by the new tech available - both now and in the future.

In short, putting people at the centre of your digital delivery will ensure success. While technology is a great enabler, it will always remain up to your teams to both see the opportunity and deliver the results.

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