

Marketing that matters with SA's best



By Leigh Andrews

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Given Charl Bassil's title as 'marketing director' for Pernod Ricard he's obviously a very busy man, but when you do finally pin him down for a 20-minute chat, his enthusiasm for the industry is clear. Here, he exclusively shares how to keep customers engaged through simple marketing techniques while all around you snap up the latest innovation.

I'd been trying to talk to Bassil since before he was announced as digital marketer of the year at this year's IAB Bookmark Awards, and since then have had so many topics to add to my discussion list that it was hard to decide what to actually ask once I finally secured a few precious minutes with him.



Charl Bassil

Luckily Bassil is as easy to talk to as he is to read about – he's witty and warm, and a [quick Google search](#) brings up quite an overwhelming list of results where he's frequently listed as the best thing to hit the South African marketing industry in a long time. That's fitting, as September is [#InnovationMonth](#) on Bizcommunity.

Rewinding to early-March though, when the Bookmarks' winners were announced, what I most wanted to know was what Bassil title of Marketer of the year is meant, both personally, as well as for the Pernod Ricard brand.

Flipping the script on expectations of marketing success

With the luxury of having had a few months to get used to the accolade, Bassil's answer flows off his tongue: for him personally, the title came as a wonderful acknowledgement of his own philosophy of collaboration and empowerment. In the corporate world, the view of success usually involves doing all you can to drive others forward. Rather, he says it should be about helping people get there through a strong entrepreneurial spirit and putting into action what all the marketing textbooks write about. For Pernod Ricard then, Bassil says people have long known the strength of its individual brands like [Jameson Whiskey](#) and [Absolut Vodka](#), but now they also see Pernod Ricard as a great place to work as a marketer. It's one of the top local FMCG umbrella brands for individuals to want to experiment and further their marketing skills.

Moving on to discuss another honour – Pernod Ricard achieved great results in this year's the [Millward Brown Insights2020 study](#) on customer-centric growth. Bassil was keen to share tips on how to perform strongly as a customer-centric organisation, particularly in today's digital age, where the consumer holds more power than ever before.

He said it's all about **daring to put the consumer at the centre** of all your marketing at a senior level, from the board through to the supply chain. The [decentralised Pernod Ricard business model](#) even features a customer at its heart. Bassil says getting this right is about interacting with the consumer at a specific moment, with the Pernod Ricard team as creators of those memories and '[moments of conviviality](#)'.

In measuring their KPIs then, Bassil says it's in everything from the brand equity scores to the [Millward Brown Link evaluation tool](#) that's used. This goes beyond digital to also creating a social distillery team, in-housing their community management and being forward-thinking. The team hates the term 'big data' and rather calls them 'insights'. Putting them to use is as simple as stepping out of your marketing beret and putting on your consumer cap instead – you're a different person influenced by different emotions first thing in the morning to when you're on your lunch break at work to when you meet friends for drinks that evening. Pernod Ricard takes this to heart and uses insights as a listening tool, also spending as much time as possible with their customers.

Exposing the essence of effective marketing

This ties into the importance of customer relationship management or CRM. Pernod Ricard is truly innovating in this realm by treating CRM with critical importance both internally and externally. The online world is seen as an extension of the consumer, because whether you have a physical chat over dinner, typed through social media or captured in the internal CRM system, it's all essentially an extension of the same conversation. Added to this, we need to step back from the marketing drawing board and remember that the consumer is a real person, which is why Pernod Ricard is big on the trend of authentic conversation.

"It's our true North star", says Bassil, as the team makes their communication as authentic as possible. The internal relationship is open with a 'No Bullsh!t' policy, underpinned by the philosophy of empathy and kindness. It's about understanding consumers as best they can, and this year seeing their Inner Circle CRM as a value-add to build long-term benefits, not just as a one-way communication platform.

Lastly, you'd be forgiven for thinking Bassil's all about constantly moving things forward and adapting to the ever-expanding universe of marketing innovation. Instead, he says not to get overwhelmed – you can take Pernod Ricard's authentic brand portfolio and distil it down to a few basic truths that resonate.

He quotes a former mentor, who always told him to take the complicated and make it simple, and then to take the simple and make it exciting. Smart people can make complexity simple, he says, but this needs to be balanced with empathy for the consumer, the agency and each other. "If you better understand people and where they come from, you can better meet their needs," concludes Bassil.

That's the key to even the most innovative marketing strategy bearing fruit in South Africa's ever-turbulent soil of change.

[Click here](#) for more on Pernod Ricard's handle of the luxury market in Africa and [here](#) to follow them on Twitter.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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