

SMG reports back on the Festival of Media

 By [Lia Smit](#)

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I was fortunate to attend this year's Festival of Media in Rome. The Festival is dedicated to all those who deal with media from a global perspective: an opportunity for the participants to share ideas and projects with top managers and most influential people in the industry...

Speakers included Daina Middleton (Head, Global Business Marketing Twitter), Alexis Ohanian (Co-founder of Reddit), David Pemsel (Deputy Chief Executive of Guardian News and Media), Jamie West (Deputy Managing Director of Sky Media), Hernan Lopez (CEO of Fox International Channels), Jimmy Maymann (CEO of The Huffington Post), Geoff Ramsay (Co-founder of emarketer) along with many other top names in the advertising industry.

First up was Hernan Lopez, CEO of Fox, challenged to give insight on the future of television. Is there still place and future for TV in this ever-growing digital landscape? Obviously he was very positive about television, and rightfully so. This platform is still superior to online in terms of impact and its ability to generate powerful emotional connectors. According to Lopez, the small screen has its place, enhancing and enabling the television message.

Laurent-Eric Le Lay chairman of TF1, a leading French media group, echoed what Lopez had to say in stating that TV is still the only medium that truly drives emotion. Viewing consumption is not only increasing according to him, but doing so at a faster pace.

We can comfortably say that television is still within its golden age, especially here in South Africa, where digital is not yet reaching the masses as well as television can.



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Diana Middleton, Head of Global Business Marketing for Twitter, feels they can help TV evolve. It is clear that the days of marketing through persuasion is over- marketing through participation is the order of the day. This is where the integration of television and social can complement and enhance a campaign. Now-casting or live-streaming will blend real life with broadcasts, enabling us to deliver far more creative television ideas.

Another talk which struck a chord was Mitch Kanner CEO of 2 Degrees Venture who chatted to Luis Balaguer, founder of Latin World Entertainment. Luis is the man behind one of the world's highest paying actresses Sofia Vergara. For 16 years, she and partner Luis Balaguer have shrewdly built up their company from a Miami talent-management firm into a licensing, marketing, production and new-media powerhouse. A source inside the firm pegs annual revenues at \$27 million. Mitch and Luis discussed what attributed to the success of Sofia and how they managed to build a digital platform of more than 272 million subscribers worldwide! The key take out was that great content drives success. The integration of brands into conversations is essential. The need to monitor consumer's conversations is key in providing valuable insights, as well as responding in a meaningful way.

The silver thread and buzz words throughout each presentation at the Festival were Programmatic and content generation.

Another huge topic was the challenge media agencies and marketers face in an ever changing media world and a complex marketing landscape. Media agencies that want to survive need to completely re-invent how they work and the solutions they deliver. Technology is freeing up talent and allowing for better strategic conversation, finding a variety of talent across various disciplines is driving change.

A very interesting presentation was given by Jon Suarez-Davis VP: Global Media, Digital Strategy for Kellogg and Rob Davis EVP, Managing Director of Starcom. The session outlined the fundamentals to a strong partnership but also the inevitable need for evolution and reinvention in today's market place. They highlighted key drivers to deliver great work and maintain great client media agency relationships.

True creative work now lives within the media agency, not the creative agency. Co-creation and a transparent partnership between the media agency and client is essential. Co-critique should exist openly in order to deliver on KPI's.

Another topic raised during the conference was the concept of TRUST. Trust is seen as the single most important thing driving commerce. People trust people more than they trust brands, while social media has scaled the power of that trust.

Word of mouth and digital conversation is also driving brand action. Sales are increasingly driven by cultural conversation in which most brands play no relevant part. Each one of us are rooted in a variety of cultures, and marketers need to target these connected cultures. Today as we speak, more than 90% of brand content is driven by consumers. Disruption is good, but we also need to add value.

This is why there is a new breed of influencers in the form of online musicians, bloggers, YouTubers and content generators, creating content and attracting unlimited followers. The power is now in the consumer's hands. A very interesting presentation attended by some of the top stars on YouTube, highlighted the fact that consumers are not influenced as much by movie stars as they are by YouTube content stars. Why? Because YouTube stars are authentic and consumers trust in them as a result. We need to harness this truth to build our brands for the future. It is important to keep the content consistent and involve your brands in the process as they know the brand best - remember these influencers can make or break your brand.

As I mentioned, content generation and programmatic were hot topics. The marketer will always be a story teller, but now we have the tools to tell a more engaging story. The role mobile is playing in this is huge. Using social and programmatic will assist in further driving mobile to scale.

David Hayes, Head of Creative Strategy for Tumblr, oversees emerging initiatives at the intersection of creative content and strategy. His chat also highlighted that content still remains the dominant force for captivating an audience with brand

storytelling. David demonstrated the importance of the creative class. He believes that allowing the creative community some freedom in their content creation for a brand will allow for better results. Why? Because content created as a piece of art, becomes a collector's item and can ensure your brand becomes timeless.

On the fun side, Bas Lansdorp presented his Mars One project, a mission to build a colony on the red planet. Bas managed to receive over 200,000 applications for this one-way trip, with very little advertising. Just how did he do it? Earned media! His project gained traction via other companies and brands, generating online PR, ATL campaigns such as South Dakota's "Dakota is better than Mars", banking endorsement and even Mars One themed Fashion shows. The power of earned media cannot be underestimated.

Lansdorp's inspiration came from learning the fact that the Olympics generated billions of ad revenue during its broadcast. I am interested to see how many eyeballs will be tuning in during the 2023 launch to Mars. Lansdorp believes his venture will drive billions of potential advertising revenue on that day.

The conference closed off with a prestigious awards ceremony.

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ABOUT LIA SMIT

Lia Smit's 20 years of experience in the media industry spans across several local and international clients, including her winning work on the Coca-Cola business for six years. In her role as Head of Strategy at SMV Group, Smit and her team are responsible for SMG's global network clients, designing product excellence, integration of tools and driving global best practices. Connected to SMV Group's Global Product Committee, Smit will lead integrated insights and the strategic framework in SA.
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