

The changing landscape of PR and sponsorship in SA

By  Manuela Dias De Deus

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I recently posted a job spec for a PR manager and I was astounded by the number of CV's I received from journalists. Not just junior-level guys looking for a change, but from heavyweight newsreaders and editorial stalwarts.



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Our business focuses primarily on communications within the entertainment and lifestyle sector, and whilst I was aware that the pool of print publications we could pitch to was diminishing, it hadn't dawned on me that the online portals were in such trouble too. I mean, everything's digital these days, right? Surely these guys are safe?

Over the last couple of years, I've been including a line item for bought media in our PR retainers, as we all know that when you send out a branded press release, you get a rate card in return.

I've advised my clients that if we want to avoid our favourite blogs closing down and limiting the channels available for our content pieces, we need to support them, and while we don't always have huge luck in getting media spend for PR, (I mean, PR's supposed to be free after all...), it's our ongoing aim to educate them on the changing media landscape in SA.

Huge value with branded content

With a smaller pool of media options, I have also had to reinvent the way I do PR and whilst influencer marketing is the route most agencies have taken, I'm seeing huge value in branded content within our booming film and event industry.

Evolution is key to the success of any business. Whilst sticking to what you know best and focusing on what you're good at is pivotal, if the landscape changes, where does that leave you? This is especially true with sponsorship. When I founded my company in 2011, I enjoyed six years as a sponsorship procurement specialist.

I worked with huge brands on multi-million rand deals and managed their partnership rights across a plethora of music festivals and international tours. But towards the end of 2016, brands' focuses shifted; they started moving away from title sponsorship deals and started creating their own events, events that they could totally 'own'.

Sure, brands still sponsor events if they can move huge volumes; like pouring rights brands at Rocking the Daisies, and of course there's still a place for sponsorships aimed at building brand-love and awareness, but the norm these days is for brands to take part in events as a lower-tier activation partner to launch new product or to have face-to-face engagement with their consumer.

Choose the right property and event owner

This shift is partly due to our economic climate and the need for brands to reallocate marketing budgets towards sales-driving activity, but it's also due to the arrogance of some event owners who want the title sponsors but are prepared to give them very little love in return.

Having worked in this field for 15 years, I'm a huge ambassador of sponsorship. The return and reach is incredible, but you have to choose the right property and event owner, and then really make it work for you. Savanna does this well with their title sponsorship of The Annual South African Savanna Comics' Choice Awards.



2018 Savanna Comics' Choice winners announced

10 Sep 2018



They tested the waters seven years ago with an official partnership, then the following year they took the title sponsorship and naming rights to several awards. Why? Because not only does the event property suit the brand, but the event owners recognised that by keeping their sponsor happy they'd not only keep the annual event alive, but they'd do something even better; they'd build the comedy industry in Africa and give our continent's talent a platform to shine.

This doesn't mean that they didn't protect their brand, they certainly haven't let their sponsors come in and make it a logo fest, but they have worked closely with Savanna to listen to what they need and build in elements to deliver on the sponsorship in an authentic, meaningful way.

This year, Chatz Connect came on board as the official telecoms partner and for the first time in my years in this game, at a press event, the brand formally thanked Savanna for making them feel welcome.

Find the right brand partnership

The insight here is that there's an incredibly strong foundation of support between the sponsors and the events media partners, all holding hands if you will, with their first goal as the success of the industry, as they know that the spillover effect will have a direct impact on their marketing efforts.

The PR and sponsorship landscapes have changed, but with change comes creative thinking and new opportunities. There are exciting new avenues for branded content within the realm of PR and we have some incredible events in SA that deliver huge value via brand partnerships, the key is finding the right ones.

ABOUT MANUELA DIAS DE DEUS

Manuela Dias De Deus is owner and Director at One-eyed Jack marketing and communications agency. She was selected as a 2018 Loeries judge for Live Communications / PR & Media Communication.

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