

Future proofing your brand for 2017

By [Nicole Shapiro](#)

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One key word springs to mind when reflecting on the year that was 2016 - tumultuous. For marketers, business people and the everyday consumer, 2016 proved a challenging one to navigate. We had to steer through extreme ups and downs - from weather to economic turbulence; shocking global and local political outcomes; rampant inflation and an exceptionally constrained consumer environment.



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The tumultuous times of 2016 showed us that there simply is no status quo against which to set your marketing plans on 'cruise control'. The smart marketers - who achieved success in this state of disorder – demonstrated a number of common traits that we can apply going into 2017. These traits include:

- A brilliant understanding of the consumer.
- A belief that technology is changing the world at a remarkable rate.
- They look at the world beyond their brand and industry.
- They have fun with their brands.

No one can predict the future with 100% certainty, but with more flux on the horizon in 2017, the traits outlined above still hold true for marketers and brand managers. So, what should smart marketers be focusing on for the coming year to future proof their brands?

1. A brilliant understanding of your consumer in 2017 will mean **AMPLIFYING VALUE**

Consumers are still feeling the effects of inflation and constrained disposable incomes as a result of the economic challenges faced in 2016. With South Africa still teetering on 'junk status', a fluctuating currency and slow economic

growth, 2017's consumer environment is still set to be challenging.

Brands will therefore need to inject value into their offering wherever possible – but, without eroding brand equity over the long term. It's easy for marketers to fall into the trap of offering discounts and promotions for short-term gains. Smart marketers will need to think about value provision differently. Instead of tarnishing brand value to offer short-term customer relief, consider value innovation opportunities. Remember that sometimes a less-for-less proposition can do the trick, or consider what part of your marketing mix can be tweaked to offer better value.

For example, in 2016, South African Breweries could have easily discounted their mainstream beer portfolio to offer better value for its cash-strapped lower income segments. Rather, they chose to launch a new Lion Lager offering, priced below brands such as Carling Black Label, Hansa and Castle Lager - with a lower of ABV of 4% and no-frills packaging. Providing value this way through a new brand offers an alternative for cash-strapped consumers who don't want to switch from beer – and importantly for SAB, it minimised the risk of tarnishing or cannibalising its mainstream portfolio.

Rhodes Food Group disrupted the baby food market by re-looking the marketing mix of the category to offer more value. With incumbent brands opting for standard glass bottles, Rhodes amplified value by disrupting packaging conventions with a fun (but cheaper) squeeze 'Squish' sachet. The packaging innovation gave them a lively market entry and allowed them to dictate a more economical price for the consumer.

2. Embracing technology in 2017 will mean FOCUSING ON THE 'PHYGITAL'

Technology adoption for brands has reached a point where it's adapt or die. In 2016, we saw a number of brands scrambling to get themselves 'online and on-demand', just to reach a point of parity with their competitors. But that is not enough! The true brand winners of 2017 will need to realise that they can't just tag technology onto their brands - rather they'll need to immerse their brands into technology. So much so, that the lines will be blurred between what's tangible and what's digital. This focus on phygital (physical and digital) is set to reinvent the rules of when and where brands operate and how they serve and interact with consumers.

TV and media are at the forefront of phygital. The slow death of cable networks and cinema is making way for on-demand TV. Replacing rerun after rerun of old music videos on MTV, content is now at the discretion of the consumer. Not only will the consumer have the choice of what to watch and when, but technology is heading in the direction where consumers can interact with the content directly through the media. For instance, if you are watching a Drake music video on your smart TV, you can click on the shoes or clothing he is wearing, and immediately be directed to a point of purchase. Hologram technology will in time take on-demand TV to the next level, and will enable viewers to interact with their favourite pop star, almost as if in real life.

We've also seen how the likes of Pokemon Go changed gaming and consumer behaviour. Venture capitalists have invested billions of Dollars into augmented reality, virtual reality and hologram technology – with these technologies disrupting everything from music to medicine to shopping. New virtual healthcare consulting and treatment is breaking down boundaries of medical diagnosis and treatment. Shopping is being revolutionised by the likes of Amazon Go with no lines

and no check-out - consumers merely grab and go, with smartphone technology seamlessly integrated into the shopping experience.

These technologies are no longer sci-fi stories from Back to the Future or The Jetsons. They're here - and they're here to stay. Marketers will need to get on board quickly and embrace this phygital phenomenon.

3. Looking at the world beyond your industry and brand in 2017 will mean CONNECTING WITH CULTURE

Connecting with social and cultural insights is a critical way in which brands achieve relevance. After all, culture is the fabric of life. It's the world around us and how we interact within it. It's what we eat, where we go, how we live and how we communicate. It gives meaning to the things we buy and the choices we make. The best brands embrace this and draw meaning from culture as it shifts. Brands use it when developing their brand and product propositions to drive activations and communications, and to plan their strategic and tactical moves.

Although some brands such as Nandos and Santam have applied cultural insight in their marketing activities, very few local brands have consistently tapped into culture in their marketing efforts for real relevance.

In a world where hyper relevance is becoming the name of the game, it only makes sense to embrace culture for ultimate impact. Consider some of the following examples from offshore as a key point of reference on how to get social and cultural and strategy right:

- Tiffany & Co. recently made headlines with a campaign featuring seven real-life couples who've all popped the question—including a same-sex couple. Tiffany's wanted to show that the road to marriage is no longer linear and can come in a variety of forms. Not only did this move tap into culture, but it also allowed the brand to tap into the growing market of same-sex couples searching for quality engagement rings.
- At the 2016 Wimbledon press conference, Serena Williams was asked how she felt about being "one of the greatest female athletes of all time", to which she responded: "I prefer one of the greatest athletes of all time". Just a few weeks later, Nike addressed this sexism in sport by launching a full-scale advertising campaign celebrating everything that makes Williams great, perfectly timed for the US open.

4. Injecting fun in 2017 will mean TAPPING INTO THE CONSUMER'S INNER CHILD

With more flux on the cards for 2017, consumers will seek more moments to escape from their daily pressures and obligations – and there's no better way to do this, than to go back to one's responsibility-free childhood.

Over the last year we've seen a birth of experiences and products that transport consumers back to their childhoods – from the increasing popularity of trampolining, to adult colouring-in books, to mazes and games like Hint Hunt.

In 2017, brands will need to lighten up; inject more fun into their propositions and should encourage consumers to take a break from the serious. Consider interesting formats, playful messaging, quirky designs and experiences that tap into nostalgia, to better speak to the consumer's carefree inner child.

Take a cue from Pierre Jourdan's 'PJ Pops' – wine pops that made headlines and excited consumers by reminding people of the lollipops they enjoyed in their childhood, to be consumed during picnics and the like.

In essence, if 2017 is set to be anything like 2016, we're in for a challenging, yet exciting ride. Not only will marketers need to be smart and brave, but also demonstrate agility as the status quo keeps shifting. I'm looking forward to tackling what the year ahead brings. The question I pose to you is: is your brand future proofed for 2017?

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