

Marketing partnerships in the digital economy



By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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The IAB SA hosted its latest insight webinar on 8 October, featuring speakers Tshegofatso Phetlhe, art director at M&C Saatchi Abel; Ann Nurock, senior partner: Relationship Audits and Management; Thalissa Pillay, NetFlorist marketing manager; Riaan Wolmarans, head of digital: media at Arena Holdings; Hellen Ndebele of Everlytic, and Timothy Spira, global head of digital content at Investec.



Tshegofatso Phetlhe, art director at M&C Saatchi; Ann Nurock, senior partner: Relationship Audits and Management; Hellen Ndebele of Everlytic, Thalissa Pillay, NetFlorist marketing manager; Riaan Wolmarans, head of digital: media at Arena Holdings and Timothy Spira, global head of digital content at Investec.

Here, Nurock, Pillay and Wolmarans share some key insights from their presentations.

■ What is the key theme or message of your talk?

Nurock: The importance of future-proofing your agency in a post-Covid world, as well as what clients want from their agencies in this new working environment.



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Pillay: The power of email – especially during lockdown – and how this form of communication has successfully contributed towards our overall revenue.

Wolmarans:

“ Content marketing is an effective way for businesses to communicate with their clients, but it works best when done in partnership with a publisher to make the most of the publisher’s expertise in both content creation and matching content with the right audience at scale. ”

■ **Talk us through some of the key insights that are at the core of partnerships that excel in marketing and how this has enabled great digital advertising with your partners.**

Nurock: The key insights are not unique to digital agencies, but apply equally:

- **Relationships** – As David Droga (founder and creative chairman of Droga5), so aptly put it: “It’s about caring beyond the brief.” Successful partnerships all boil down to trust.
- **Critical thinking** – In the digital contagion of ‘always on’, everybody is so busy working they don’t stop to ask: “Why are we doing this?” They don’t stop to think.
- **Problem-solving** – Brands were not growing pre-Covid and now, things are far worse after months of lockdown. Agencies need to prove their value to clients through creativity and provide more business solutions.
- **Creativity** – According to Forrester Research, “89% of people are ignoring ads”. Creativity is the only solution to helping brands grow. And that’s not just creativity in terms of ads; its creativity in terms of the entire brand ecosystem.
- **Shared humanity** – It’s about collaboration and empathy. A kinder, gentler world where purpose has never been more important. It’s now about actions and social impact.
- **Be noticed, brave, and trusted** – As two of marketing greats put it: “If you want to get noticed, you need to take risks”- Fernando Machado, CMO Burger King. “But the basis of great work is trust” - Tor Myhren VP Marketing Apple. Many agencies don’t have the right relationships with their clients, which results in work that is vanilla.
- **Passive vs proactive** – Clients are asking for more innovative thinking and thought leadership. They want business ideas that truly add value.
- **Agility and focus** – Agility has never been more important in a world of Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Now is the time when consistency, clarity, and simplicity are needed. Do fewer things, better.
- **Internal culture** – This is what truly differentiates agencies. Stand for something. It’s about authenticity and purpose.

Pillay: Key insights are:

Tenure – I’ve been with NetFlorist for almost 10 years and it’s a guarantee that a contact person will change at least every two years. Everlytic are the exception to the rule though, Jodine and I have worked together since we started using Everlytic seven years ago. Hellen, our “account manager” (but really Superwoman) has been on the NetFlorist account for the last four years. Everything we know about NetFlorist email subscribers, the three of us have learnt together. Through their tenure, Everlytic has come to understand our very seasonal business, its unique requirements and share in our goals. When you have a senior team that’s overseeing your account and strategy for so long, it becomes second nature for them to suggest their own innovative ideas and applicable insights.

A personal touch – While I normally only get in touch when I need something, our relationship resembles one where you can pick up the phone and chat to a friend after years and pick up from the same place you left off. Earlier this year when the entire NetFlorist team was on short time contracts, I had no choice but to radio for help. Short of designing and developing our emails, the Everlytic team managed our new fresh produce and grocery strategy effortlessly (and after hours too).

Wolmarans: Key insights are: Brands should trust publishers – We know what type or format of content resonates with our readers, so any edits to existing content, or decisions taken about newly created content, are all meant to make your content perform better for our specific audience. One-off content campaigns can do well for certain goals (such as

reporting on a new product launch) but longer-term partnerships with a publisher allow much more room for innovative content across various formats. Brands can also invest in their own content units, as Investec has done, which brings benefits both internally and in working with publisher partners. If this is a brand's decision, it has to find the right people with the right skills for the job (and this might not be staff from PR or marketing units).

■ **What one main call to action would you advise your fellow industry at this time (in context of your talk) to help foster great relationships that help to beat the benchmark in digital?**

Nurock: Become a trusted advisor to your clients. Provide them with more business solutions.

Pillay:

“ Marketing is not just about selling your product and/or your company's services, it's about selling yourself too. Build key relationships with your partners, both personally and professionally, because you never know when you may need them to go above and beyond for you. Also, send them flowers, it helps. ”

Wolmarans: This is a fantastic time to explore how digital content marketing can support your business – SA has a variety of excellent publishers reaching a multitude of general and niche audiences. Start a relationship with a publisher but trust your publishing partner to advise you on best practice for content.

■ **At this time of crisis – please share one key learning that you have personally (or professionally) taken on board that you believe will assist others to navigate the future of work as we (are getting to) know it.**

Nurock:

“ Be human! ”

Pillay: One of my favourite quotes has always been Alvin Toffler: “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn”. Nothing is more true amidst these crazy times.

Wolmarans: The Covid-19 lockdown in SA resulted in a massive influx of traffic (and digital subscribers) to our websites, proving that readers trust our titles (some of which are more than 100 years old) as a source of important information. That [benefits both our journalism and our advertising clients](#). But the world is different now, and people's personal ecosystems have changed (working from home), as have their priorities (personal finance challenges as unemployment soars; entrepreneurship and business management during a pandemic; etc). We have to adapt to these needs with the content we offer.

The IAB SA has taken its Insight Series – in partnership with Everlytic, GetSmarter - a 2U Inc. brand and Bizcommunity – online to provide 60 minutes of insights featuring fellow and future industry leaders on subjects selected by IAB members and the industry at large to make better digital decisions. You can watch a recording of this event via the IAB member portal and sign up to our next IAB Insight Event on IAB SA 2021 Predictions [here](#).

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the former editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She was also a contributing writer.

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- #2020AfricaBrandSummit: The role of PR and communication during crisis - 14 Oct 2020
- #ABInsightSeries: Marketing partnerships in the digital economy - 12 Oct 2020
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