

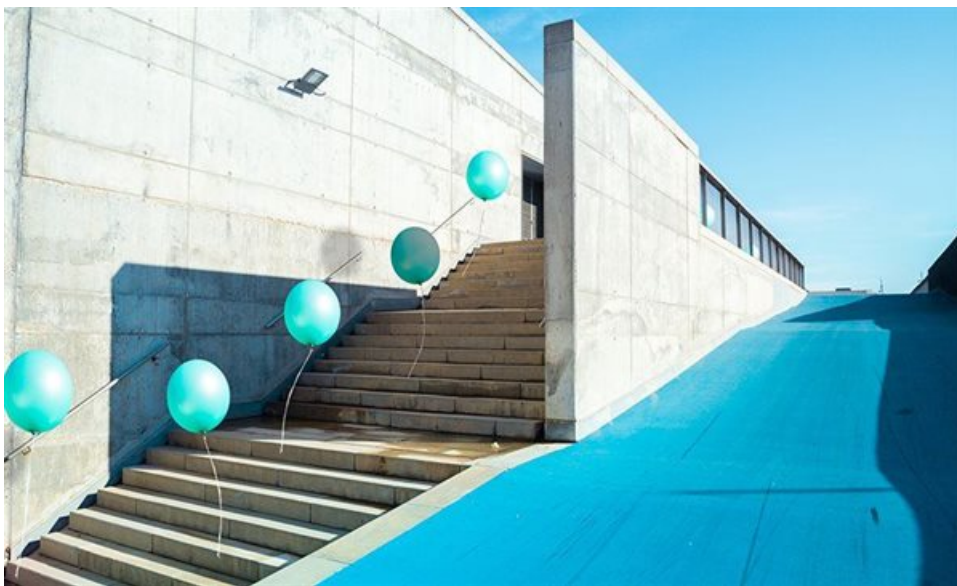
The revival of CRM

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Customer relations management (CRM) is having a moment in boardrooms across the world as marketing technology and cloud-based applications solve business challenges like never before. Jaco Lintvelt, managing director of [iProspect SA](#), weighs in.

The marketing, media and creative industries are buzzing with terms like data-driven marketing, data-driven decision-making and data-informed creative executions, but to be honest, these are not new concepts. CRM has been used in marketing for decades, but thanks to technological advances, data can be creatively mined to help brands take care of their customers with unique experiences, compelling content on the right platform, at the right time, and a host of other services only imagined in the years when a good CRM was an updated filing system.



Challenging creativity

Artificial intelligence, deep learning and next-level algorithms have the potential to solve complex business problems and provide unique points of differentiation when engaging with current and potential customers, but there are a few key challenges for brands in sub-Saharan Africa:

1. A CRM system needs to be able to move data cleanly into the cloud to utilise the innovative solutions that can be built on it.
2. CRM and loyalty data only exists in the offline world and is not matched up with the data points the brand has about their customers in the online world.
3. The CRM system is badly structured and not well maintained, and the data is outdated.
4. The CRM system also lives in a silo somewhere in the company, so it's not utilised by sales, marketing and the business-intelligence team as a collective.
5. The CRM database is not linked to marketing technology applications, and therefore cannot be used in the activation of media and other marketing functions.

CRM is an opportunity for rich customer experiences

The [experience economy](#) is chiefly about a better consumer experience, but brands are not yet fully delivering on that promise. Design templates used for web and mobile platforms, the way product content is prepared, the user experiences

offered and recommended engines are mostly the same and largely template-driven. This is where there is enormous potential for creativity.

Many experts in the media space believe that personalisation is the solution. But while that might drive a short-term sale, will that really help brand growth and salience in the longer term if the right infrastructure is not in place to understand consumers better? The investment in [MarTech](#) and data platforms is at an all-time high, but brands should utilise the CRM data available and apply creativity in the way they build content and creative material for their consumer.



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The way forward

If brands can get a structured, cohesive technology infrastructure in place, there is a unique opportunity for them to treat numbers better. A good CRM is vibrant, organic and designed to integrate multiple technical skills (data, SI, marketing and branding), prioritising creativity above all. This, linked to the cloud environment where multiple applications can be used to make the most of the first-party data set, will set a brand up to solve real business problems in new ways if they really understand what challenges they are trying to solve.

Product-driven initiatives, in siloed channels, that target segments with scheduled campaigns have now moved to connecting with audiences through integrated, omnichannel conversations, in real time, and this gives creative agencies an unbelievable opportunity to tailor the way they address consumers.

The new CRM focuses on a customer-led relationship – one that a brand fosters through context, connectivity and content. It's a relationship that is reliant on data, facilitated by technology and evaluated over time. The new version is based on people and the meaningful experiences they expect, the options they have and how brands can rise to meet them.

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