

Education: Filling the skills gap

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Advertising agencies and colleges say they must step up their talent-spotting and training efforts to provide the industry with the skills it needs...



(Image: Rod Baker)

Ludi Koekemoer, dean of the AAA School of Advertising, says schools are struggling to meet the demands of an industry in transformation - not just in terms of race but also technology. Digital and social media are changing the way consumers interact with brands and receive advertising messages.

Elfriede Dreyer, dean of the Open Window training institution, says there are shortages in skills like Web development, interactive design and digital and Web writing.

Some traditional arts are also in short supply. Though the student numbers crisis in advertising copywriting appears to have abated - for now - there is still concern about the quality of language skills.

In part, that's down to poor education standards in many SA high schools, particularly in townships. The situation isn't helped by the fact that many young people do most of their writing on social media, which discourages grammar and correct spelling. Says FCB SA CEO Brett Morris: "We have a generation of texters."

It boils down to education - or lack thereof

Di Charton, head of Cape Town's Red & Yellow School, says: "The lower SA's literacy levels drop, the fewer good copywriters there will be."

Some state universities offer degrees that provide a foothold in the industry. Dedicated advertising schools are often expensive, so are out of reach of many young South Africans, unless they can win bursaries.

The formal industry education sector is unearthing some outstanding talent but it's only a fraction of what is potentially available. That's why a growing number of agencies are running their own talent searches. Some target promising black high school pupils. "Waiting for talent won't work. You have to go and unblock the bottlenecks," says Ogilvy & Mather SA talent officer Lauren Woolf.

The challenge is made greater by the fact that in many schools advertising is not promoted as a potential career. Koekemoer says: "If I go to even a well-off school to give a 30-minute talk on the advertising industry, I'm likely to spend the first 20 explaining what advertising is."

Source: *Financial Mail*, via I-Net Bridge

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