

Defining South Africa's digital marketing skills gap

 By [Kat Scholtz](#)

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South African marketing and advertising employers are keenly aware that they need access to digital skills and expertise to remain competitive, but they need to more clearly define where the gap in their digital skills capabilities lies and what knowledge their employees will need to close it.

Local organisations need access to digital professionals who have specialist knowledge of disciplines such as search, user experience, and social media as well as a strategic understanding of how different digital disciplines, touch points and tactics fit together in an integrated marketing strategy.

To use digital effectively, brands and agencies need to recruit people with a depth of skill in one or more digital tactics as well as a broad knowledge of the bigger strategic picture.

What it means to have digital skills...

Marketing and advertising practitioners are well aware that digital tools are transforming consumer behaviour and thus marketing practices. The fact that they need digital skills is not in question.

What is a question, however, is what exactly it means to have digital skills in an environment where so many people use digital technology every day and believe that this qualifies them as experts. In social media, for example, it is possible to overestimate one's knowledge and skill for strategic implementation.

Sure, most people spend time on social media and understand it well as a tool for personal communication. But strategic application as part of an integrated campaign or marketing plan is different. The same principle applies to many other digital marketing tools.

Understanding each digital tool

The digital toolkit - SEO, social, web development, user experience, and so forth - is most powerful when integrated into the overall marketing experience. The skills gap we've encountered in some agencies and brands is a lack of people who understand each digital tool in enough depth to know what it can do, as well as how to combine these efficiently and effectively to create better marketing outcomes and more powerful customer experiences.

In addition, the fast pace of digital change means that the next-generation of marketers need to be able to keep their knowledge up to date independently. They must have an aptitude and the skill to self-learn and evolve alongside changing

consumer behaviour and technology. Fortunately industry educators such as Red & Yellow have made this knowledge and learning accessible via a multitude of e-learning programmes that tackle the need to acquire relevant digital toolkits.

So, we need to be more specific when discussing the digital skills gap, the word 'digital' itself is extremely broad. We need more than awareness of digital technology or everyday knowledge of digital tools. We also need an in-depth understanding of integrated marketing strategy as well as the in-depth skills to build innovative campaigns and experiences that engage consumers' attention.

ABOUT KAT SCHOLTZ

Kat is the knowledge director at Red & Yellow and drives the conceptualisation, production of content and compilation of video material for Red & Yellow's array of courses. She has played a key role in the globally acclaimed textbook, eMarketing: The Essential Guide to Marketing in a Digital World, since its inception and is the editor of the most recent 5th edition. The book has achieved more than 900 000 downloads to date.

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