

Was media planning really less precise before AI?

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Look around today and you cannot escape hearing about how AI is changing the media and creative industries almost overnight.

AI technologies are transforming media planning from a manual, labour-intensive process into a data-driven, dynamic, and agile discipline. By harnessing the power of AI technologies, media planners can deliver highly targeted, personalised advertising experiences that resonate with audiences, drive engagement, and deliver measurable results. It's a dream come true when there is a massive focus for marketers to hone in on and report on ROAS and ROI.



So the assumption might be made that as we didn't have this technology earlier, our media planning approaches prior to AI might be questionable. Nothing could be further from the truth. Media strategy development, planning and deployment is a specific, data-informed specialisation that requires a blend of technical skill as well as creative artistry to hone the perfect approach to reach your specific consumer set.

Ask the extremely technical strategists, planners, buyers and insights team members who pre-date AI, what it was like and how they targeted consumers, and you will be surprised that despite the “low-tech” approach, the targeting mechanisms were sophisticated and detailed. There has never been a broad-based strategic approach to media planning, even when we were targeting the entire country, there were still very nuanced audience profiles being built. Precision audiences can now be scaled with AI, but they have always existed in some way or form within the media agencies. This is evidenced by just how many analytics and insight specialists and data scientists sit within any of the media agencies today.

The media industry at large, brands and media group companies invested and continue to invest millions of rands into data and research, bespoke technology solutions, audience research panels and attribution modelling and optimisation tools. These in turn allow media teams to deliver unique segmentation models by brand to get the performance outcomes needed. This is nothing new, but what AI has allowed us to do, is perform the more mundane tasks quicker, and refine the audience information to allow us to target consumers with a bit more nuance. This is improved precision marketing – it's not new, it is just better. With privacy laws being what they are, the dream of being able to target down to a precise singular identity might remain a bit out of reach as consumers start to understand and limit their access and their device access.

Media strategy and planning disciplines have always been responsible custodians of client budgets. We have always been specific in the way we apply planning methodologies to build audiences that allow us to reach the most in-market consumers. What AI has allowed us to do is, be more specific faster. This in turn is giving us back valuable thinking time so that we can find more interesting ways in which to present brands to consumers for their consideration. In this time-starved, cluttered environment it is the best use of both human creativity and technological advancement.

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