

New online community resource for the advertising and marketing industry

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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The School of Thought, an online community for the marketing and advertising community that focuses on knowledge sharing and talent/skills building, launched recently.



Source: © rawpixel [123rf](#) The School of Thought, an online community for the marketing and advertising community that focuses on knowledge sharing and talent/skills building, launched recently

It is the brainchild of Gillian Rightford, founder of Adtherapy, who came up with the idea during lockdown. “I was musing that if anything happened to me, my kids should sell my reference folder.”

It then occurred to her how many people have excellent training material sitting in their hard drives, and how so many people are hungry for career and knowledge growth.

“I have run the Business Marketing Academy for many years (building in-house marketing academies for corporate clients), so have a repertoire of over 100 courses built and designed by the best people in the industry, both in SA and abroad,” she explains.

She approached a few of them about the idea of converting the material online and selling it to a community and they

responded with a resounding 'yes'.

The result is the School of Thought.

Growth is the core premise

“The core premise of the School of Thought is growth – growth of knowledge, career growth, growth of professionalism,” she says.

It does this through published articles in channels relating to the key areas within the industry (e.g. media, digital and social, creativity, pitching, etc) and encouraging peer-to-peer and mentee-mentor conversations.

“It offers a range of self-paced or live courses targeted at either marketers or people within the broader communication sectors or both.

“It has a reference library full of essential reads, tools, tips and “schools of thought”; it seeks to entertain and grow talent through a book club, webinars and activities,” Rightford explains.

“But,” she says, “it is also a place for the community to network and mingle online.”

Get the right answers quicker

Rightford says she gets requests daily for expertise and advice in certain areas. “Google is one thing, but a few curated and selected articles or frameworks get you to the right answers far quicker.”

In addition, she gets requests weekly for individual or team training to build capabilities and professionalism in marketing and agency teams.

“Face-to-face training is not affordable on an individual basis, and workshop training can also be too expensive and time-consuming for many companies,” she says.

“This online course offering will allow individuals to engage in self-paced self-mastery, whether they are new to the industry, an 'ambitious middle' or even a senior CMO who wants to upskill on an area they aren't familiar with but are too senior to ask!” she explains.

Foundational skills and marketing skills

The need for this is clear she says. “Marketing is a department, that people sometimes migrate to from elsewhere in the business and so lack the foundational skills, while many people in advertising may have come from an ad school and lack the marketing fundamentals.”

Or she says they may understand a sliver of the industry but not what the client needs. “Or they are project managers and not strategic thinkers,” she says

She adds that the industry’s penchant for chasing new shiny objects means that again the foundational skills are not always there. (“And there are many shiny objects!”)

“The flip side is that if you have the foundational skills, there are so many new aspects to understand and so a degree of upskilling and continuous learning is always there,” she says.

If you’re familiar with Professor Mark Ritson’s writings and videos, she explains, you will know this is a regular topic for him – “he says famously or infamously around 50% of marketers have no proper training in marketing”.

“He recently wrote about the high levels of Impostor Syndrome in marketing, where he said the best antidote was, of course, to get better at core skills.”



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A lack of connection

“What makes this worse is that there is a massive disconnect between the C-Suite and marketing in many businesses. Getting better at the job means being able to bridge some of that disconnect,” she states.

However, the big barrier to upskilling and continuous growth is time. “Marketing and advertising teams work relentlessly long hours and the 'important-but-not-urgent' aspect of learning falls by the wayside,” she adds.

But for her, the biggest frustration is the lack of connection with the client’s business, with weak and fluffy strategy that does not address the challenges in the category and is based on limited consumer understanding.

“Both marketers and agencies are guilty of wishful thinking in terms of what the impact of their activities on consumers can hope to achieve,” says Rightford.

Understand your strategic process

She explains that the creative process starts with the client brief. “And when I say most of them are dire, it’s a massive understatement. They are un-strategic, with a laundry list of generic and unmeasurable objectives, and a consumer-ask that is all but impossible with a ridiculously small budget.”

What she would want for the creative process is that marketers get better at understanding their own strategic process and the million-dollar importance of a good brief that refines and articulates a clear objective.

“Then the agencies translate that into meaningful, compelling, and differentiated creative output that doesn’t add to the cacophony of wasted advertising in the universe,” she says.

And this is where she hopes that the School of Thought can help, by offering training courses to help in these areas. “The

library has wonderful case studies, tools and templates to use, and hopefully the opportunity for mentorship and coaching (both on and off the platform) is something that people buy into.”

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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