

Journey or destination?

 By [Craig Page-Lee](#)

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I have waited a long time to contribute to this topic, not just as a representative of Posterscope South Africa, but as a former architect and retail designer that understands space utilization and the impact that all layers of media, messaging, signage, digital screens and the myriad of other ambient and subliminal elements within the built environment have on consumers or unsuspecting travellers.

The topic warrants two responses, the first being that I somewhat disagree with the statement that the airport is where the passenger's journey begins, and the second being that to a large degree, the exploitation of every single available surface, whether walls, floor, ceiling, columns, air-conditioning ducts, escalators, treads and risers to stairways, restaurant tables, trays, plates, cutlery bands, toilet walls, urinals, mirrors, shoe-polish personnel and the myriad of kiosks and pop-up stores, to name but a few, is a total sensory overload for users of the environment, whether they are travellers or staff working within these environments.

On point one, I'll keep it simple; the traveller's journey begins in their mind the minute the decision to travel has been considered. The journey continues through the various levels of consideration regarding destination, airline, airport, date, time, how to get there, what to do at the other end, car hire, public transport, hotel or other accommodation, activities, meetings, lunch, shopping and so on. Each and every one of these thoughts and questions can be answered, or create even more confusion, through the different entry points used to make the decision and to close the loop on that decision, as well from the myriad of other media messages that consumers are exposed to every day.

Most important touch-point

The airport is probably the most important touch-point in a traveller's journey and it is the place where brands either build or destroy their reputation with consumers or travellers alike. In many instances, it is not the brand that has failed in its promise, but the inability of the brand to stand out from the clutter and visual noise that is so synonymous with the airport environments in SA.

Understanding consumer behavior prior to and during travel is vitally important to ensure that any message delivery or brand experience is not one of annoyance, irritation, negative disruption or just getting lost in the clutter, but rather one of informing, calming, caring and adding value, thereby making the entire journey a pleasurable experience, from initial consideration, through to final destination.

Stressed out

As a specialist out-of-home (OOH) communications agency providing strategy, planning and buying services for brands within the airport environment, it is essential that Posterscope understands the entire consumer/traveller journey, and that when at the airport a multitude of other factors come to play and influence the strategic recommendations presented to clients.

Recent documented research proves that stress levels rise, as do anticipation and excitement levels on arrival at the airport - message delivery is either lost to travellers, or is seen as a negative disruption and irritation in this regard, unless it comes with some form of value-added content that will improve the remainder of the journey.

We also note that stress levels dip slightly after check-in, but then rise sharply while going through security and passport control and eventually subside once on airside where the journey slows down - specifically when using the services of the airport business lounges.

The focus during the pre-flight period on airside is on shopping and eating and this is where brands should maximize the media opportunities for message delivery, especially since anticipation and excitement levels are at their highest in the traveller's journey. The research suggests that stress levels rise again at boarding time and continue to rise during flight time, through arrivals at the end destination and only subside after the collection of baggage. Message delivery is either lost to travellers, or is seen as a negative disruption and irritation in this regard, unless it comes with some form of value-added content that will improve the remainder of the journey.

Fortunately, anticipation and excitement levels remain relatively high at the end destination (much higher than the stress levels at the end destination), thereby presenting an ideal opportunity to serve relevant, informative and value-adding messaging to travellers once landside again at the end destination.

Factors

Factors driving strategic recommendations on media within the airport environment include, but are not limited to the following: Journey to the airport - the introduction of the Gautrain in JHB has fundamentally changed the way travellers access the airport and eliminating the need for travellers to drive to the airport.

Much of the OOH media lining the roads and national motorways leading to the airport loses relevance to these travellers. That said, a new network of media touch-points along the Gautrain rail route has been rolled-out and a different way of communicating with travellers is evolving. We are not only seeing more targeted static broadcast medium on platforms at each station, but the introduction of sophisticated digital networks which allow a very different kind of message delivery and the opportunity to serve real time, value-adding information to travellers prior to arrival at the airport.

At the airport we are seeing: The roll-out of digital networks (airport.tv) on landside, through check-in procedures and on airside another opportunity to serve real-time, value-adding information to travellers. There are more and more pop-up kiosks offering 'specialist' services on both landside and airside. The roll-out of interactive digital way-finding and information management networks on landside - another opportunity to serve real-time, value-adding information to travellers prior to departure.

The introduction of new formats and unused building elements being turned into media touch-points in and around food courts and along walkways to and from check-in counters (airside) and the introduction of a multitude of standalone elements in the form of charging stations for mobile phones and electronic equipment. A real value-add to travellers, but an opportunity missed to serve real-time, value-adding information to travellers, or to providing free wi-fi access while waiting prior to boarding.

Critical success factors in defining, creating and managing media effectively within the airports of South Africa (airport management companies and their respective intermediaries, media owners, media agencies, creative agencies, clients and brand owners alike) can be defined as follows:

- Enhancing the airport environment and the traveller experience through the media networks available and through the advertising on offer - not creating bewilderment and confusion.
- Airport management company to create a 'world class' experience - this is seriously lacking airport management company to facilitate the development of interconnected communications platforms for advertisers to reach their target audience - digital, promotions, media - and for multiple media concessionaires to allow cross-platform integrated campaigns.
- Airport management companies to develop commercially viable contracts with media concessionaires that encourage new developments and innovation.
- Provision of updated and relevant research to the media agencies - something that is sorely lacking.
- Use of technology (e.g. apps) to connect brands with travellers.
- Use of social media channels to update travellers and provide additional self-help options such as check-in, bag drop, e-gates etc - Connectivity is essential in this regard.
- Understanding what will attract and engage the traveller intelligently in this new world - providing accurate and relevant real-time data to assist travellers when on the move.
- Big brand feel - dominate media platforms and ensure that the message carries through from pre-journey, to airport, through landside, through airside and to destination arrival if at all possible.

SA is fortunate to have some of the best airports on the continent. Let's not destroy the aesthetic appeal and experience due to a lack of shared vision between airport operators and media concessionaires. Let's respect the built environment and ensure that we uphold the aesthetic intent of the original building design, in the same way that any brand would want to uphold its' own brand integrity. Advertisers are the ones that lose in this regard and the entire media and communications industry is dependent on their continuous support of the medium."

ABOUT CRAIG PAGE-LEE

Craig Page-Lee, is managing director of Posterscope SA, an Out-of-Home communications agency. He is an architect and retail designer by qualification. With 21 years' experience across the fields of marketing, branding, advertising, media, retail and design, he has worked on some of the world's leading brands, including managing the Vodafone and Cannon global brand accounts while living in London.

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