

How to uplift your brand in a complex social media space



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Any kind of business providing a service that applies to the target market of the people using social networks should be available to interact with its people. This emerged last week at the two-day SAMRA conference hosted on the banks of the Vaal River, where about 200 researchers met to discuss the latest developments, strategies and thinking of marketing research.



Addressing delegates, Sarah Macdonald said there are many reasons that consumers follow brands online. While many seek benefits from promotions or special offers, some want to get more information about the brand - its products or services - and others just want to support or connect with a brand they enjoy.

"Biggest carriers of messages"

"I feel that, in order to make a brand known, the company needs to invest in marketing, and in this fast-growing technological world the Internet and social sites are the biggest carriers of messages," she pointed out.

SA has currently close to four million Facebook users, 55 000 Twitteratti and over 10 million active unique Mxit users.

"Companies should latch on to this and take advantage of it. Social networking is the way to go to uplift brands. All brands should be connected to some form of social media. These days, it would be crazy for them not to."

However, things are becoming too complex and moving so fast in the social media space to such an extent that many brand managers and marketers in South Africa are getting more and more confused - and therefore losing the plot altogether, delegates were told.

Applying intl strategies sometimes irrelevant

According to Macdonald, applying international strategies in the local marketing scene is sometimes proving to be irrelevant. Therefore, she recommended the following 10 commandments for successfully marketing brands in the social media space:

1. Target the right audience: brands need to be active and involved and keep thinking of new marketing gimmicks to

remain relevant. They must also appeal to the correct market audience, otherwise the effect is lost.

2. Maintain interest by regularly uploading or linking to interesting content.
3. Provide opportunities for feedback: many consumers love the fact that brands take the time to respond to some of the comments on their page. This shows that they really care about their supporters.
4. Have interactive promotions: consumers feel that interacting with brands is cool if it really is interactive - not just one-way talk from your side. Feedback always makes them feel like 'wow, they really do read these things, it's not just for show'.
5. Respond to questions, comments and criticisms quickly and follow up on complaints: consumers believe that if they ask a question, make a comment or even complain, they should receive an answer quickly and it should be followed up, where necessary.
6. Remember to be professional, friendly and personable at all times: consumers expect professional and friendly service, even though it is on a social networking site.
7. Build relationships; do not just push products. Consumers do not like companies that do not interact with their audience and just want attention when they are trying to sell products.
8. Remain transparent, open and accessible.
9. Keep things fun and social.
10. Listen to, and learn from customers' comment.

"Consumers desire more interaction with brands and are taking initiative to facilitate interactions with brands via social media channels," Macdonald said, quoting SA technology commentator Mike Stopforth.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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