

Influencers take to the web and run the streets

 By [Mongezi Mtati](#)

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2011 saw the rise of more social media influencers and thought leaders; more conversations influenced how brands are perceived; and the fad of a Facebook page became more questioned than ever before. Or did that apply only in conferences and meetings I went to?



Here are my predictions for 2012:

1. Beyond social media presence

South Africa followed the trend of having some or other form of social media existence in 2010 and 2011, where in 2011 presence alone began losing its appeal.

In 2012, brands will ask more value-based questions and search for influencers and thought leaders with whom to align themselves. Organisations will be more open to innovation, where the approach will include more experimentation, rather than working within the norm.

2. Rise of influencer engagement

Brands are beginning to understand the importance of being talked about both online and offline. They asked us some testing questions in 2011 about the meaning and reach of conversations, which was proof that they are looking for more meaningful engagement.

In 2012, brands will measure their reach and want more value for their money, which will mean campaigns will be more focused.

3. Reach beyond the numbers

The hype of 100 000 Twitter followers or "likes" on a Facebook page will slowly start being questioned, as companies learn to understand the value of engagement.

In 2012, I predict that clients will search for relevance and insight, rather than numbers and more meaningless chatter.

4. Proof is in the data

The importance of understanding people who show an interest in brands online will increase this year, as I have seen clients questioning the fad.

While we know that social media platforms present us with nuggets of information about customers, accounting for an estimated 10% of total reach, I foresee that more marketers and advertisers will be tasked with analysing that data and interpreting it in useful ways for their clients.

5. Growth of the app economy

Access to mobile internet is soaring due to cheaper devices; developers are constantly building web and mobile applications; and companies want to connect with customers on their terms. These three factors will see an increase

in the mobile applications built and customised for individual companies in 2012.

Some of these apps will include platforms that enable rating and recommendation to facilitate easy online shopping.

6. Location-based shopping and interaction

Over the past few months, I have noticed that more companies, their customers, and developers alike want to interact in real-time.

This, in my opinion, will give rise to more in-store ratings of customer service and customer experience, which will be public. It will increase the ability for people and brands to increase interaction and improve customer satisfaction.

7. Real-time takes to the fore

More organisations improved their real-time interaction in 2011, which I predict will increase in 2012. The few brands that mastered it in 2011 and retained customer loyalty will have more competition this year.

8. The crowds lead

Following the need to analyse data and insights sourced from the web as a sample of what customers want, companies will begin listening and implementing solutions that mirror the needs of their customers. It will happen faster than ever before, as more organisations will harness its advantages.

Organisations, instead of just implementing campaigns, will listen first and engage the customer - as opposed to reaching out blindly to the masses.

9. Customer engagement platforms

Related to analysing data and understanding what customers want, I foresee more organisations building their own platforms to engage customers. The consumer, along with the [Customer Protection Act](#), will give rise to more accountability, where the most innovative brands will reap rewards.

10. Peer-to-peer recommendation moves up a notch

Brands are slowly beginning to realise that their reputation hangs on thought leader and influencer perceptions. They will begin to seek more organic growth through conversation, as opposed to simply launching themselves at the masses.

11. SA companies increase gamification

Simply put, gamification refers to the idea of having attributes that are adapted from video gaming. This spans from having different levels to rewarding participation in some way.

As companies look to differentiate online, rewarding interaction and participation will be more significant.

12. Mobile payment grows

SA businesses have begun to understand the importance of having mobile platforms and mobisites.

I predict that, in 2012, we will begin to see more of them creating ways to monetise and accept payment from these platforms.

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ABOUT MONGEZI MTATI

Mongezi Mati founded WordStart to help companies generate buzz around their products and services among South African influencers. He is passionate about helping brands to connect the dots from social media, digital data and human interactions outside the web. Mati is also digital analyst, a speaker and a contributor on some of South Africa's leading platforms.

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