

## Is social media the petrol in PR's engine?

 By Marcus Brewster

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At the [2014 PRISM Awards](#) earlier this year, keynote speaker and judge Jeremy Maggs affirmed that "PR is at the centre of the communication mix today". Maggs, a veteran industry commentator, made the claim off the back of an extraordinary - indeed I would say seismic - shift in the advertising agency world. A year ago, only seven of the top 20 SA ad agencies had PR in their service offering. Today, 19 of the top 20 do.



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That rush to PR signals one of two things. Firstly, that PR must be a fast growing industry for so many ad agency owners to want to harness those additional billings for their group turnover. Or secondly, that clients must be demanding fully integrated solutions forcing ad agency owners to add that missing note to their chord of competencies. Or a combination of both, of course.

## High octane question

However, the assertion that PR is a fast growing industry might be accelerated not just by client demand (and agency group response) for integration, but by one key additive - social media. Which begs the high octane question: Where does social media sit - with PR or with digital?

The rise of the digital agency and the phenomenal growth of that industry needs no further exposition. However, I would suggest that the same client fuel stop at the digital pump has also filled the PR tank.

When social media entered the marketing sphere, it always seemed to me that it fitted very naturally into the PR space. Terms like content, audiences and engagement are concepts that inform the very DNA of PR. In the vernacular of publicity, content could be a press release and audiences could be synonymous with stakeholders. In other words, social media wasn't a whole new ball game, it was simply the same ball game played on a slightly different field by a younger generation of players wearing new uniforms.

(Digital agencies of course bring a whole lot of other guns to the knife fight of course - they code and build apps and deliver a number of technological solutions which PR agencies aren't traditionally resourced to provide. However, when it comes to social media - crafting engaging content and seeding it - PR probably has the longer and arguably better pedigree).

## New dominance

If the annual PRISM Awards are any barometer of the new dominance of social media in the PR industry, the following statistic will prove enlightening. When social was introduced as a category two years ago, there were seven entries. At this year's ceremony, 19 campaigns were entered, a 271% increase. As impressive a jump as that is, it's more interesting when benchmarked against the media relations category, the traditional calling card of public relations. This year, in the Sectors part of the PRISM Awards, there were only eight entries for media relations versus the 19 for social media.

Clearly more PR agencies think they are doing extraordinary, award-calibre work in social media than in the traditional remit of publicity generation.

And that's good news for the drive forward of public relations.

## ABOUT MARCUS BREWSTER

marcusbrewster is a brand synonymous with PR excellence in SA. An industry innovator, leader, and inspiration, Brewster affiliated his multi-award winning boutique firm with larger Level 1 BBBEE marketing/comms agency MediaRevolution for scale in 2016 and went on to launch Marcus Brewster International in Europe the following year. Marcus currently lives on - and actively promotes - the Mediterranean island of Malta. For African, S. African and European PR enquiries, contact [marcus@marcusbrewster.com](mailto:marcus@marcusbrewster.com) or WhatsApp on (+356) 9931 3322

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