

Trends SA - La Vida Loca

 By [Gavin Mills](#)

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2014 has only just begun and already January is about done! As we grit our teeth and surge into the wide open spaces of a brand new year, it wouldn't hurt to have a last glance back because, without doubt, amazing things since the new millennium, over the past half decade, and indeed, the past year, will influence the way living and life play out in 2014 and beyond...

1. International lifescape

The shenanigans of global players in both politics and business have had - and continue to have - mind boggling impact on the lives of everyone on the planet.

Almost a century after the Wall Street crash brought the global economy to its knees; the arch-moguls of high-finance have done it again. Alleged hanky panky and monkey business - mostly of Ben Bernanke and his cohorts - rocked the world's economy to its timbers in 2008. And in the wake, the IMF running around pimping debt has done very little to bring relief or solution either in the medium or long-term. Sure, quantitative easing might have deferred but it is unlikely it will cure without drastic action - which no doubt will resonate like a boil on your bum with the global populous.

On the upswing however, the world wide web and social media have made the masses exponentially more aware of what's going on, and have provided a platform for opinion and change - which already can be seen to have influenced decisions and action. The cases of Edward Snowden and Julian Assange being of particular note - both bearing significant influence on CIA information gathering channels and the way clandestine organisations conduct themselves.

...And most significant for us Africans, Africa has become the Eldorado of the 21st century and countries and corporate alike are queuing to ride the wave.

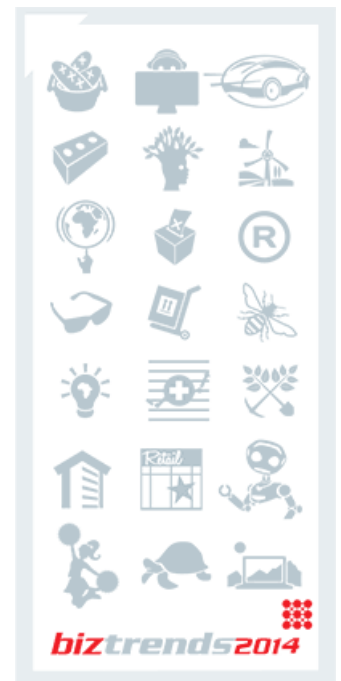
2. SA lifescape

Sadly, the tragic but not unexpected passing of Madiba marks the end of an epoch and of a great life well lived. We now face the prospects of life after Mandela. How that works out, only time will tell.

Unemployment is still rampant, strikes are never-ending, business is far from booming... but 2014 is an election year: all politicians will be on their best behaviour trying to muster support and win votes.

Initiatives focusing on provision of services, housing and job creation will no doubt intensify, which will certainly have an impact on morale - which one could not be chastised for believing is probably the most important factor governing our trajectory moving forward. If we are upbeat, it will stimulate confidence. Confidence will stimulate spending, which will stimulate the economy, which will create jobs.

Will it be enough to tip the scales? Doubtfully. But it will help push us in the right direction.



Looking further to the positive side, almost everyone in SA (and on the African continent) is connected to the grid somehow - mostly through mobile phones.

And it seems we are finally making headway with effective public services and service delivery. We have buses and trains and taxis still (and will for years to come) reign free. Pity about the e-tolls... This is an issue which is likely to still attract attention from all spheres leading into the elections and beyond.

In a nutshell, things are moving forward, but we still have a long and hard road ahead.

3. Being connected

The internet and social media have made 100% sure that life as we knew it will never be the same again, and the mobile phone has become the most prized personal possession of all time, probably eclipsing even the wheel for the impact it has had on human life and the human race.

In spite of the ongoing poverty and joblessness, almost the entire population is connected - which is good. Everyone knows the two things most necessary to get a job are being connected and having wheels.

With almost everyone literally connected, more and more are moving into the 'smart set' and manufacturers are juggling with the new dichotomy: Big or small.

Technological advancements have eliminated the challenges of scale. We can make things as big or small as we like. So when it comes to mobile handsets, there seems to be confusion which way to go. Some top brands are covering all bases having small phones, big phones, small pads, big pads.

It seems as though this battle will intensify. Users want to be able to see stuff on their mobiles without using a microscope, but want something small and convenient to put in a pocket or bag.

The race will probably move into the best of both: Bluetooth technology will come to the fore through things like jewellery, bracelets, pendants etc which will change the way we engage with our handsets. The phone will stay in your pocket with low power bluetooth accessories accessing your information and phone, without you having to remove it from its place of concealment.

This will no doubt spurn an entire new industry, as well as the approach of big boys as they venture out to conquer and dominate in the same way the advent of apps seems to have gone and are going.

4. Internet and bandwidth

The jostle for bandwidth will without a doubt intensify but despite never-ending enhancements in performance, due to unabating escalations in consumer demands, will still fall far short of consumer desires and expectations.

Even though speed has gotten better, satellite has gotten better, peripherals and receivers have gotten better and the overall user experience has improved exponentially over the past few years (and continues to do so nearly by the day) bandwidth will never be perceived as enough.

5. Social media

Social media and apps are the fun places coming out of 2013.

Thankfully the frenzied 'play for the sake of play' mentally seems to have rationalised to a degree. But the explosion of social media platforms has resulted to a large degree in consumers feeling exposed to invasion rather than enticed by

invitation.

Despite the fact that technology provides us with the means to reach just about anyone, find out what we want just about anyone, and do so just about whenever we want, we are slowly learning that having access does not necessarily mean having a sure fire way to convert.

Consumers are becoming more discerning, more selective and even more petulant. There is no doubt that new bloods to Facebook are significantly more active and gaga than those who have dabbled for a while.

Making effective use of social media for business moving forward will depend less on the technocrat and search engine optimiser and more on the communicator and effective marketer who craft communication in ways that fire the imagination, make engagement as simple as possible, and adds true benefit as opposed to smoke and mirror thrills.

6. Apps

Apps were certainly the new Fandango in 2013. Everyone from ice cream to toilet paper jumped on the bandwagon creating apps, fishing for likes and believing an app would provide as much shopfront and consumer pressure as a mall.

Wrong. Apps are great and the way to go, no doubt. But once again, with the amount of apps coming out... A person and a phone can only load so much. It's like throwing every bit of print available into Exclusive Books. In reality, the junk will sink and the good stuff will float. 2014 and beyond will no doubt prove that having an app is not the answer. Having an incredible app is.

7. Events and activations

Trying to predict trends and actions in the events and activations industry without taking all the above into account would be short sighted.

We know money is not flying out of windows, so no doubt budget will continue to play a role. Does that mean big events are gone? Not the way I see it. It will not be about budget exclusively. It will be more and more about ROI - as it should be.

The biggest issue with events is that compared to other media platforms, footprint and reach are generally minute - meaning cost per hit is comparatively astronomical.

But compared to all other media platforms bar none, the impact of a live face-to-face encounter is exponentially richer and more rewarding to both brand and consumer. So the win-win would be to engage consumers and target audiences with the impact of an event but with the reach of online or conventional media.

This seems to suggest not choosing either one or the other, but rather more effective strategic integration of all of the above: Above-the-line and outdoor will continue to drive awareness. Digital, online and social media will continue to engage and activate, and relationships will be entrenched and consummated through events in ways where the some of the contributing parts come together in resonance to make up significantly more the whole, and more importantly, together as campaigns, up the chances and opportunities of winning mind space and driving sales.

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