

Facebook takes SA social media top spot

Facebook has become the biggest social network in South Africa, seeing its strongest growth yet in the past year - and overtaking Mxit for the first time.



This was one of the key findings of the SA Social Media Landscape 2014 research study, released today by World Wide Worx and Fuseware. The study showed that Facebook has 9,4-million active users in South Africa, up from 6,8-million users a year ago.

Mxit, the previous market leader, fell back to 7,4-million users from 9,5-million, as it began to feel the effects of competing instant messaging services like WhatsApp and 2Go, as well as from the growth of social networking on phones.

Twitter saw the highest percentage growth among the major social networks, from 2,4-million to 5,5-million - showing 129% growth in 12 months.

"The most significant finding, aside from the growth itself, was the extent to which social networks are being used on phones in South Africa," says Arthur Goldstuck, MD of technology market researchers World Wide Worx. "No less than 87% of Facebook users and 85% of Twitter users are accessing these tools on their phones."

Google+ lagging

Google+ has remained the laggard among social networks, with only 466,000 active users, only marginally higher than a year ago. However, the photo sharing and special effects app Instagram has exploded in use in South Africa, from below 100,000 a year ago to 680,000 in August 2013.



"We can expect this number to grow even more dramatically in the coming year as Instagram becomes a popular app on Android phones, while Android itself is expected to grow significantly in South Africa in the coming year," says Mike Wronski, MD of social network analytics company Fuseware.

Both social networking and instant messaging apps are dominant in downloads for smartphones and tablets.



WhatsApp is presently the most popular app in the Android, Apple and Windows app stores, with Facebook in second place in the Android and Windows stores, while Instagram takes the Apple store runner-up slot. The impact of BlackBerry extending BBM availability to Samsung devices is reflected in the BBM Android app taking third place in the Google Play Store.

SA corporations boost social media use

The report highlights the intensified use of social media by South African corporations, revealing that 93% of major brands use Facebook, 79% use Twitter, 58% YouTube, 46% LinkedIn and 28% Pinterest. Fewer than 1 in 10 use Mxit, Foursquare or Instagram.

"The big trend in corporate use of social media is that internal marketing teams are taking charge, rather than outsourced agencies," says Wronski. "Just over half of major brands (54%) rely on their own marketing team, a further 9% on public relations teams, and only 16% on third parties."

That's not all bad news for agencies, however: while 53% of respondents say they will build up their social media skills by investing in training existing teams, 27% will rely on specialist social media agencies.

"Such investment is critical," says Goldstuck. "The survey shows that the measurement of social media effectiveness remains relatively unsophisticated. On Twitter, 83% of companies measure effectiveness by number of followers, while only 48% conduct sentiment analysis. On Facebook, 87% measure number of fans and 79% number of posts and comments, while only 54% are assessing the tone of those posts through sentiment analysis."

Social media as a business tool

The importance of social media as a business tool was acknowledged by almost all respondents: 91% agreed that it had the potential for building a business. However, only 19% said they were getting as much value from social media as they could - indicating that most were still learning how to embrace the tool.

Nevertheless, analysis of South Africa's top 50 brands by value reveals a strong showing: they have an average of 58,000 Facebook fans each, growing at 4,8% a month. The average number of YouTube account views is 259,000 per brand, but with an average subscriber base for their YouTube channels of only 366. On Twitter, they have an average of 12,785 followers each, with an average of 1,856 mentions a month.

The downside is that the average response time for these brands addressing customer issues on Twitter is 271 minutes.

"Taking more than four hours to respond to a customer in such an immediate environment shows a gap in social media that needs to be closed," says Wronski.

The SA Social Media Landscape 2014 research report, available from the end of this week, contains extensive data on both consumer and corporate use of social networks. An update to the report, providing detailed instant messaging statistics and social media forecasts for 2014, will be released at the end of 2013.

For more information, visit <http://www.worldwideworx.com> and <http://www.fuseware.net>.

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