

Wake up and smell the promos

 By [Sarah-Jane Boden](#)

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During rocky times my father's wise words remind me that... he is always right. "Nothing in life is free, my girl" was his disquieting adage in response to an idea at which was launching myself, gung-ho.

It's also the maxim that sums up the current engagement fluctuations running wildfire on Facebook - agitating content and digital agencies across the world - especially small, lean ones like us that are sensitive to change and, quite frankly, like freebies to remain just that - free. So we can continue to provide an affordable option for our clients that can't afford the big guys.

It began so innocently - there we were - frolicking barefoot in the heady communications opportunity that the behemoth content channel provided our clients - **for free**.

Facebook filled the gap that many creative digital marketers had been looking for - a cosy online zone that allows brands to peep into consumers' lives and reach out and connect with them - in their living rooms, offices, bedrooms, kitchens, taxis, and so on. Engaging fans with witty, cheesy, or just blatantly brand-y messaging that (hopefully) triggered a smile, a laugh, a share, a like, a comment and ultimately influenced a purchasing decision.

While a boost of paid-for Facebook advertising could gain you a good base to start with and some fresh fans intermittently - once a fan had **opted in** to your brand page, it was up to you to keep them engaged - *this* is what the client paid for - the crafting of great content that talks to lifelong fans on a daily basis, keeping them close and building a strong bond between you.

A model no more

Our team of content architects at SoulProviders curate posts carefully, conveying the essence of the brands we represent. We make sure the images are eye-catching, the content engaging and that the posts flow - creating a dynamic, digital magazine-like brand page of which our clients are proud. Based on engagement levels we used to have a good idea of what was working and could continue to strategically shape posts that we knew would be well received.

But according to the severe changes we've recently observed on Facebook, this simple, **good content+fans=happiness** model is no more. The very fans who **chose** to receive brand updates and content are no longer getting it as they used to. Have you noticed that you're not seeing much branded content on your stream? I have - and I follow over 900 different pages (research, research I tell you!) Over the last two months the statistics measuring engagement and organic reach has declined to such a degree that on average a post on a fan page of over 10,000 fans will be lucky to be seen by 300 or 400

people.

This week, we, along with everyone else blogging about it on the interwebs, have had posts on brand pages with 4,000+ fans hit 4 sets of eyeballs. The shame. Facebook claims 16% of fans see every post, but our current actual numbers, tracked over months, dispute this.

It's not about the money

So what do we do? Don't bother signing the petition because this is about Facebook's IPO listing and any business leader would monetise in a similar way, given the chance (and the pressure). Monetisation is not the issue - we can accept that 'all good things come to an end' - the issue is that Facebook is not transparent with their changes and they don't appear to respect their clients, leaving us in precarious situations where we can never be master of our art.

It goes something like this: You notice engagement levels dropping across your fan pages. Your first panicked move is to max-out the company credit card by jumping on the recently launched *promoted posts* that enable you to promote posts to your fans and all their friends for R60-R800 per post, depending on fan numbers. You "enhance" every post you can by paying for promotions, hoping that by the time you feedback to your client, numbers will be back up. And wow - it works! You promote posts like nobody's business and juggle the game until it looks like you're getting a bit of leg-over on Facebook. Then, with much trepidation, you recon at month end and realise you've spent half your income on Facebook ads and your small business's cashflow is totally out of whack. The problem is, the artificial "quick fix" is a dirty place to go because, once you stop plastering over the cracks on your page with promoted posts, engagement levels plummet once again and you're left back in the dwang.

So what do we do now?

Here are five tips for 'maintaining the high ground' over these recent Facebook changes:

- Call a meeting with your client immediately.
- Explain that engaging with fans on Facebook brand pages is no longer a part of the free service. If they want the previous or improved engagement numbers, they need to pay for it. It's that simple.
- Explain the difference between *adverts*, *sponsored stories* and *promoted posts*. Estimate a monthly budget for promoted posts and sponsored stories ON TOP of the current retainer (some retainers do include ads already).
- If they don't want to pay more you can cut down the number of posts created (i.e. content hours) and replace this spend with promotional spend. Not ideal and begs the question: Does it still matter how good your content is if you have to pay for it to be seen?
- Organise an internal brainstorm (with energy drinks and muffins) and start strategising as to where else and how else you can activate digital engagement for your clients - outside of Facebook.

And above all, 'keep your eye on the Facebook ball' - these Dog Days are far from over and remember, "there are no guarantees in life", my girl.

ABOUT SARAH-JANE BODEN

SoulProviders Collective is a creative agency based in Bryanston. We deliver content across media channels, wherever great creative is required from Broadcast, ATL, through to new media channels. We are a team of young and passionate imagineers, creators, instigators, marketers, writers, designers - excited about creative content and the online space. We are going places, are you coming with us?
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