

# Digital doesn't change anything

 By [Andre Redelinghuys](#)

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A more connected world changes how we find, share and use information, even what and how we buy but, fundamentally, we are still driven by the same needs.

One often now hears statements such as "Today's consumers are empowered and liberated and want to get involved in how their favorite brands behave in the marketplace" or "Your customers want to do things, not buy things; they want to listen to each other, not you; and they want to adapt your brand to make it their own."

The sentiment is right. People are more connected, more empowered, more informed. But do they want to get involved with how brands behave or make brands their own?

## **People want things that work**

There are those who want customisation or even to influence brands, but most people want things to suit them from the outset, off the shelf, easy to consume. And if they don't get what they want, they choose another brand.

Attempting to influence a brand is an investment for an outsider. It takes time and effort. I think there's a misinterpretation around the need to adapt brands that's really just people complaining, hoping to be compensated for a bad product, service or experience.

The hyper-connected world is a catalyst of sorts or an amplifier of interactions. Even though new channels make it easier for people to complain, the fundamental personalities will remain: influencers will influence and the majority will mostly remain passive.

The truth is the vast majority of people want to be directed. That's why brands work.

Brands are appealing because they stand for something rigid, prepackaged ideals, sets of meaning that people buy into because they are what they are. People don't want to buy into amorphous entities that have loosely defined meaning.

## **Not a meritocracy**

Just making things people like is not enough, though. With the sheer weight of information out there now, many great things lie undiscovered while our attention is often held by junk that's mushroomed into the latest trending meme.

Often now the viral spread of a video or some content becomes a news story, making the content more popular, for being popular...

The same tools that brands have to connect with more people, can be the ones that bury them in the digital world.

### **You can make a plan**

You have to earn your share of attention in the heavily geared digital world but the good news is that, with a good plan, this can be done.

It's clear that consumer brands can do great things to harness the social world to drive awareness, sales and behaviour. There are thousands of case studies showing how brands overcame challenges with smart, integrated and measurable campaigns.

Corporate brands are bit further down the learning curve, but great work is now being done to connect them with stakeholders, internal and external.

Having a strategy is key. Social networks are like boneyards for the multitude of brands with idle presences. 'Being there' is the first step, but diving in is the wrong approach.

It must be clear what your mission is in a particular space. These questions need answers: what do we want to achieve? Who will 'man' our presence? Who will drive content? Why will people be interested in what we have to share?

As channels and layers of information stack up faster than we can make sense of them, simplicity becomes more appealing. Compelling offerings communicated clearly will always resonate.

### **Dealing with uncertainty**

To a large extent, social media trades in buzz. It also benefits from buzz. There's a whole genre of videos, mostly created by agencies, that cycle through mind-blowing facts about the connected world (animated to a cool soundtrack). Many of these "facts" are selective, unchecked and overstated.

The truth is social media is draped in uncertainty. It feels like it's been here a while but just the other day people were being super-poked on their fun walls. We are generation one, the first generation of users, marketers and business people navigating this giant sociological project.

The Facebook IPO is testament to the uncertainty. Its market capitalisation plummeted by 25%, US\$40bn, in three days of trading. Everyone knows Facebook is important but no one knows exactly how important. 900 million users is incredible, but the quality of the audience is unknown - meaning what mind space are they in? Is this a serious business platform or just a place where people kill time?

We should embrace technology and use it to our advantage but we should also limit the sentiment and 'panic buying' while there are so many unknowns. Classifying the tools we have correctly will enable us to harness them.

### **Digital doesn't change anything fundamentally, but changes everything otherwise**

Modern communication may not have changed our deepest needs just yet but it changes just about all the rest. Access to information, an overloaded world with viral highs and out-of-sight lows means brands that get electronic communication right will gain significant advantage, while most will remain off the radar.

Even if we are the same at the core, it can't be denied that electronic communication channels, particularly social media, are game changers. They are changing the way people behave as they find themselves in new circumstances.

As always, this is a somewhat narrow view, as the majority of the world's population isn't fully connected, but devices, data and access will eventually permeate down the pyramid and open perhaps the most exciting chapter of this story.

Despite some of the crazed sentiment around, we are still dealing with the same human condition. If brands stay true to delivering against people's needs, with a cool head and a plan, they can harness the power of a connected world.

## ABOUT ANDRE REDELINGHUYS

Andre heads up strategy at The Jupiter Drawing Room Johannesburg. As a creative strategist, Andre believes that the creativity of advertising should transcend communication, and with clients, agencies can provide some of the change the world is craving. Inspired by quality and innovation, he has built brands and communication on the ground, across Africa and the Middle East. Follow @andre\_red, connect on LinkedIn.  
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