

How Mr Price got it right

 By [Saint-Francis Tohlang](#)

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The blogosphere; as a collective of unique voices from digital citizens of the world has proliferated the Web 2.0 with such an air of independence that bloggers have engendered an interesting kind of power. This power is largely accrued through speaking with an untainted, opinionated, authoritative and unmediated voice.

Companies and brands, in recent times, have begun to recognise the power of platforms such as [hellopeter.com](#), social media customer rants, positive affirmation from blogs and would much rather align themselves as opposed to create enemies.

Blogging power

Consumer brands are increasingly creating allies with bloggers and the greater blogosphere community because they seek to build a mutually beneficial relationship that ultimately unearths the power of the blogosphere.

In this regard it becomes interesting to note that last week on 24 July, Mr Price flew about 35 top fashion journalists, mostly influential fashion and style bloggers, to their Durban headquarters to usher in a new era for the retailer: the launch of Mr Price Online. The excursion was planned to give South Africa's fashion elite first hand experience of their new offering and give them a distinctly Mr Price taste of innovation.

This comes in the wake of the recent #DMMADebate, which set twitter ablaze. At the axis of this debate was whether bloggers should be paid for the publicity they afford some brands. The debate extended into other issues such as whether bloggers should disclose when certain blog posts were paid for/sponsored or be transparent regarding any product placement.

To position myself in the greater debate: I have always maintained that bloggers are an undervalued resource in terms of campaigns and PR exposure. Yes, I do believe that bloggers have every right to request payment if the stature of their blog warrants so. If advertising is what you want from bloggers then I think one should compensate, not necessarily pay, for such. The debate aside; the era of bloggers being viewed as amateur brand enthusiasts is all changing. PR agencies now employ specialist community managers to manage bloggers and integrate blog platform opportunities in campaigns.

What makes blogger voices so important in promotion?

Bloggers are the Joes' and Nina's who are consumers like us. They have claimed a share of the online space to either share, document or create an experience for those visiting their blogs. Those that do it right mostly have a specific niche focus and have some sort of online presence that results in a following. Brands take a keen interest because bloggers provide a more accessible form of word-of-mouth, which can be disseminated into far extending networks. Consumers trust word of mouth promotion more as opposed to 'distrustful' advertising. Brands benefit from blog posts that detail positive brand experience as this is deemed more authentic.

I always maintain that it takes a smart brand to listen. To listen to the transient trends and changes around them, listen to the consumers and to listen out for new ways of accessing and speaking to their consumers. Mr Price is a brand that has been smart enough to listen to the fashion blogger's newfound influence in the industry.

What on face value may seem like extravagant expenditure - return airfare for 35 plus minus journalists/bloggers, hosting and feeding them and also allowing them a shopping spree on your tab is in actual fact a stroke of genius from Mr Price. Let me deconstruct the genius in how ultimately this will pay dividends in the long run.

Getting it right

Firstly, Mr Price is perhaps one of the few brands that have not only recognised the power and great social currency bloggers yield, but in recognising that they have found meaningful ways of building relationships with bloggers. It is a brand that has unselfishly looked to utilise the power bloggers yield and at the same time engage them in a mutually beneficial relationship. Through their blog www.inthefashionloop.com, Mr Price actively engages with fellow bloggers and looks to contribute in either continuing to build other bloggers profiles and getting them involved in their campaigns.



MRP mobisite

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They have covered the first basis of engaging bloggers. In "splurging", however let it be known that an odd R100K for a launch is next to nothing, Mr Price created an experience for these influential people. The result? Mr Price was the number one trending topic in South Africa on that day. Why? They had the foresight of providing each guest with an iPad (for the duration of the experience) not only to share their experience but also explore the online shopping platform. This had a ripple effect as top bloggers tweeted the awesomeness of being at the Mr Price Headquarters and this captured the true essence of social media: conversation. Twitter was abuzz with exciting conversation about the online store launching to the public on 30 July due to the drove of tweets from the headquarters.



MRP website navigation

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In deciding mostly to select bloggers such as Marco from *Man of The Cloth*, Funeka of *Quirky Stylista*, Malibongwe of *Skattie What are you Wearing?* and many other top bloggers and fashion journalists - these voices would ultimately have an influencing say on those that follow their style and blogs. Moreover, bloggers would naturally want to blog about the wonderful experience therefore promoting not only the upcoming online shopping platform but the Mr Price brand. They are not obliged to blog, Mr Price wouldn't have paid them to, but in creating a wonderful experience they have garnered great PR opportunities.

It is in recognising bloggers and the contribution they make to the fashion industry that Mr Price has got it right. It is in recognise the wonderful opportunities that a brand can create through meaningful relationships with bloggers that Mr Price has got it right. Moreover continuing to showcase the value inherent in their famed value model, not just in their clothing but in the way they seek to build brand equity and perception that Mr Price have got it very right in fact.

ABOUT SAINT-FRANCIS TOHLANG

Saint-Francis Tohlang is an Independent Insight Consultant and Trend Analyst. He provides insight observations to different stakeholders such as Flux Trends, HDI Youth Marketeers, Lovelife, Savino Del Bene and South African trend observations to a leading international trend firm. He holds an MA in Media from UCT and continues to research in the areas of media markets and strategies, consumer culture and popular subcultures. Follow @SaintFrancisT on Twitter.

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