

How to capture consumers' attention

By  Leigh Andrews

17 May 2016

Who better than the continent's top Instagrammer to let us in on the importance of visual identity and helping brands make better use of Instagram? I got him to put down the lens for a few minutes and share a handful of exclusive tips.

Gareth Pon is a well-known name in the local visual branding space, having followed the 'film maker and photographer' path from an early age. He recently spoke at the [MojoCon](#) mobile journalism conference in Dublin, but it's his work with mobile photography in particular that has proven hugely successful, having been featured by the likes of CNN, MTV, *Huffington Post*, *Mail & Guardian* and Instagram's official blog.

And it's the fact that he was named Africa's top Instagrammer of 2014 and 2015 by the African Blogger Awards that really caught my visual marketing eye. Here, Pon lets us in on how brands can maximise their use of Instagram in building communities and expanding product and brand awareness across digital platforms in a creative way.



Gareth Pon. Image © Rby Potterill

1. Tell us about your belief that everyone should have at least one ridiculous dream they believe can come true...

Pon: I believe that everyone should have at least one ridiculous dream. Once you as an individual see that dream becoming a possibility, it pushes your belief into a place where any other dream you have just seems attainable. Because every other dream fails to compare to your 'ridiculous' dream.

Personally, I've always had a fascination with space, science fiction and the stars. Unfortunately when I left school, South Africa did not have an active space programme, which is sad, because I would have loved to have studied to become an astronaut. So, believing all things are possible I made that my dream, to one day go to space and see the curvature of the Earth. Now with huge leaps being taken in private space travel, I believe my trip to space could be just around the corner!

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Apparently mist over LeMorne is pretty rare. #gimme💎💎💎💎💎 #luxmoment #luxlemorne
#luxin4days #igersmauritius

A photo posted by Gareth Pon : South African (@garethpon) on Apr 20, 2016 at 9:24pm PDT

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2. What did your role as Samsung South Africa's official digital imaging ambassador in 2015 entail?

Pon: I was selected to showcase Samsung's NX range of cameras and mobile devices to my fans on Instagram. This was a mutually beneficial relationship where both parties assisted each other. Samsung provided camera gear, support and exposure and I provided my audience, creative talent and knowledge of the digital marketing space. We saw it as an easy fit and had a great year of collaborating. On occasion I would also lead exclusive photo walks, give workshops and do guest appearances at events. All in all it was a fun experience.

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Throwback from that time I hung out with @kitkat_ch in #Switzerland chasing glaciers. Not that you can actually chase glaciers, because they don't really run, it's more like hiking to where they've been for thousands of years. #anasianaswissanda💎💎in💎💎💎💎 #spottheprocket #gpmeetseu #gpmeetsch #makemoments #momentwide

A photo posted by Gareth Pon : South African (@garethpon) on Mar 12, 2016 at 4:37am PST

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3. Talk us through your experience as Africa's top Instagrammer of 2014 and 2015 at the African Blog Awards.

Pon: The African Blogger Awards partnered with [Webfluentia](#), which is an amazing platform for influencers as it offers the tools and opportunities to work with brands and a huge database of creatives. Entry is simple, you just register with Webfluentia as an influencer, the analysis is then done over all their influencers and the winners are determined by technical analysis done by Webfluentia, announced on Twitter. It has been an honour to carry the title for two consecutive years in a row. The award has given me various opportunities with press and new business opportunities.

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◆◆ skies #spottheprocket #gpmeetsirl

A photo posted by Gareth Pon : South African (@garethpon) on Apr 29, 2016 at 12:23pm PDT

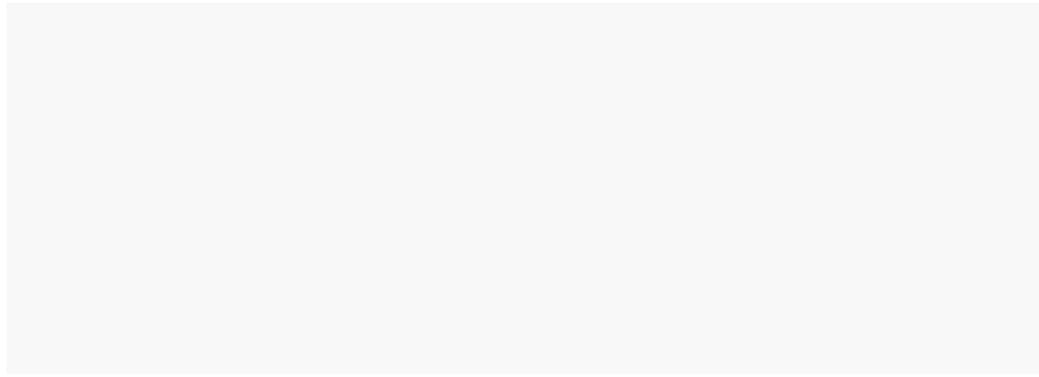
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4. What does it take to be popular as an Instagrammer?

Pon: It really boils down to genuine engagement. I built up my audience and popularity from being as approachable as possible. I really enjoy meeting people and bringing people together. In early 2013 I founded a National South African Instagram community, which was a privilege and great opportunity to pioneer Instagram in South Africa. This really translated into becoming “popular” and getting my personal brand out there. I also travelled as often as possible. I met the most amazing people overseas and networked wherever I could. I’ve met some of my closest friends and biggest inspirations through the platform.

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I spent the weekend at @alternativeprintworkshop in Johannesburg with Film Photography master Dennis Da Silva shooting some BW film on my uncles LeicaFlex just before developing and printing the photos all by hand. Such an amazing experience, being born into the digital age it reminded me how tangible photography used to be before the days of pixels and sensors. If you want to see more of what @alternativeprintworkshop do, check out their website. #spottheprocket #alternativeprintworkshop #filmisnotdead

A photo posted by Gareth Pon : South African (@garethpon) on Mar 7, 2016 at 11:43am PST

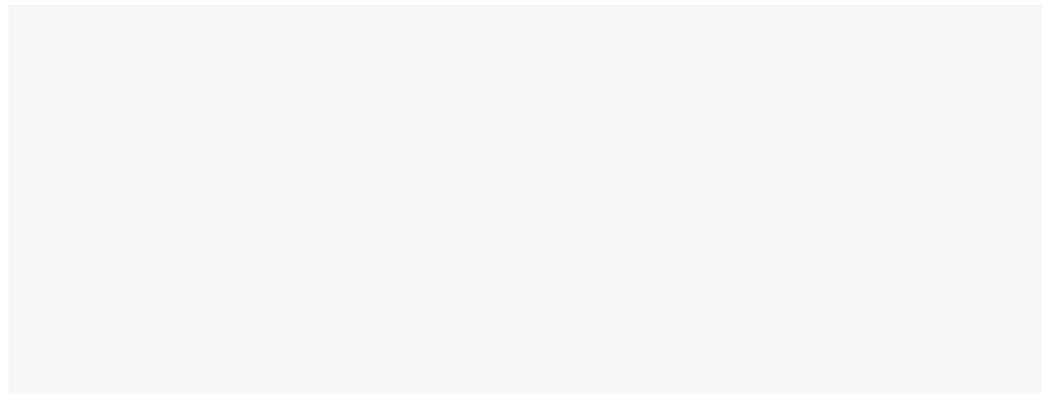
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5. How can brands make better use of Instagram as a way to capture consumers' attention?

Pon: I'm all about visual identity and brand. Instagram is a great way to showcase your culture and story in a very visual way. If you as a brand create a compelling visual story and communicate it well on Instagram, then you'll get audiences who appreciate that. Instagram should also be treated as a separate visual entity. It cannot just be thrown into the same category of Facebook and Twitter, because the audience on Instagram is much more visually inclined. Instagram needs to have a "real" element to it. The best brands on Instagram feel alive and not robotic.

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Dublin streets with @palomaparrot & @danrubin Excited to be here as one of the guest speakers on the photography panel for @mojoconirl #Spottheprocket #gmeetsirl

A photo posted by Gareth Pon : South African (@garethpon) on Apr 28, 2016 at 11:38pm PDT

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b. Tell us about the state of social media across the continent.

Pon: From what I've witnessed, we are very active in Africa and some of the greatest conversations are taking place online. However, in the marketing sense, we have a long way to go to recognise social media as a viable platform for intense advertising – brands are beginning to recognise the value, but the perception of social media still sits within the space of “press” rather than marketing. This perspective has already shifted around the world and is being utilised in very effective ways, but locally we have a long way to go to alter the perspective of both brands and consumers in recognising social media as a platform for advertising. A large part of my job is educating brands and agencies about the value of social media and how it has very different elements to traditional advertising.

That it does. For more on Gareth, be sure to follow his [Instagram profile](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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