

ttrumpeting the good news about business chat on mobile apps

 By Leigh Andrews

22 Oct 2014

Businesses should always be looking for new ways to communicate with customers, but is approaching them on mobile chat platforms a step too far? Grant Theis, co-founder of ttrumpet, disagrees.



According to [Juniper Research](#), mobile instant messaging is expected to account for 75% of the traffic or 63 trillion messages in 2018 - that's in four years and counting. So if your mobile strategy isn't up to scratch just yet, best you get to work on it. Grant Theis, cofounder of ttrumpet, tells us more.

■ ***Before we get into the nitty-gritty, tell us more about ttrumpet***

Theis: ttrumpet is an OTT platform that allows people to first and foremost make free calls and messaging via an app. The app then provides a third function that we call 'Discover', which allows consumers to shop online, get vouchers, find places and immerse with brands. In our view it is the most advanced platform of its kind in the world. The business has been in development for two years with a few thousand beta users and will be launched to consumers, brands and merchants in November 2014. The business is 100%-owned by the Fastcomm Group, a niche South African technology company, backed by prominent business people including Patrice Motsepe.

The business started out as a mobile shopping/voucher app but pivoted its strategy to an app that would pass the 'toothbrush test'. We decided that we didn't want an app that would be used once a month but one that would be used many times a day. We therefore had to redefine our focus into a calling and chat app that married up a consumer ecosystem with a brand and merchant ecosystem. But in doing that we had to outperform, at least from a feature perspective the goliaths of the world in messaging and calling. We believe we are well on our way in doing this and our roadmap is packed with bleeding edge features and technology.

■ ***How is ttrumpet shaking up the mobile industry and demystifying mobile by offering a packaged platform?***

Theis: Firstly we offer great value to consumers. Calls between ttrumpet users are free and we offer the ability to make ttrumpet out calls to non-ttrumpet users at the cheapest rate in South Africa - R0.65 to mobile. Where we are different to other VOIP players such as Skype in that we have integrated into all the mobile operators in South Africa. We offer a wallet whereby consumers can purchase ttrumpet credits and also use them for standard GSM calls when they are out of data coverage. The consumer can then just seamlessly place a GSM call using their credits. The same principle applies to Wi-Fi - we are in the process of integrating thousands of Wi-Fi hotspots into the app. When the user sees the light go green in their app they can seamlessly connect to the hotspot, get free access or use their credits for paid access. No sign in, endless browser interactions etc - just a demystified experience. We really don't care what the colour of your SIM card is. We are going to do the same with international roaming. The current charging is criminal.

■ ***Does that mean mobile is now more competitive and worthwhile for brands?***

Theis: I think that brands now have a fantastic channel to immerse themselves with their consumers. Brands need to have their own app presence but also need to be part of a wide consumer ecosystem such as ttrumpet. We have built a whole platform of tools that allow brands to immerse with customers on the app whether it is through Augmented Reality, image recognition, ibeacons, vouchering, loyalty layering - we have it covered.

■ ***Chat has taken the world by storm and that brands need to look for innovative ways to explore their markets. Is this any form of Instant Messaging or IM? Can you elaborate firstly on the most effective chat platforms, and secondly on how brands can use them to engage with consumers?***

Theis: There is no doubt that Whatsapp and WeChat are the leaders in consumer numbers. And there is no doubt that it is

beneficial for a brand to create a following or a channel within these apps. Since trumpet was born out of a brand- and merchant-focused strategy, we are ideally placed to really provide a Swiss army knife of tools for brands to communicate with customers. Without letting the cat out of the bag, we will be launching our merchant and brand channels in December. These channels will harness a lot of technology that we have already built. The brand can communicate through the channel using all the native applications of a smartphone e.g. they can provide Augmented Reality or image recognition campaigns, challenges, promotions and offers via vouchering. trumpet is integrated into all the worlds' leading point of sale vendors through a multi patented technology. This allows a brand to offer a promotion whereby a consumer gives a code to the till operator. Once the code is scanned or entered the brand is able to see real-time that the customer has moved from Latte to Skinny Latte.

■ ***How could a brand best push valuable information to their target audiences and create a two-way-communication with the brand and its customer, with chat seen as such a personal channel, between individuals?***

Theis: Firstly you need to entice the consumer to opt in. If the brand or merchant does not have that kind of relationship with their customer they will need to incentivise them for the privilege of having constant communication with them. Therefore for a consumer to 'follow' a merchant in a chat service, it has to be compelling. This is prevalent right down to the smallest of merchants. If you frequent your local Italian restaurant quite often they should entice you to follow them. This is not because they are necessarily going to give you a discount but rather that they are going to tell you that they have a fresh pot of Osso Buco on the stove tonight and that you can book a table through their trumpet channel through Open Table. The same principle applies to a dentist, physio, teacher etc. Your appointments could be scheduled via chat, class homework etc. As with all of these 'channels' or social media initiatives, you can't dabble. If you do it you must embrace it. I have seen this movie so many times where people start a blog or Facebook site with huge gusto and it fizzles out through fatigue. Chat is more interactive and personal though, so offers a lot more than just a broadcasting medium.

■ ***Moving on from chat, there are numerous apps that are allowing mobile marketing to take place. Is it working and will we be seeing more of this? Can you give a few examples?***

Theis: For the first time app usage has outstripped mobile browsing so there is a good ecosystem out there to choose from. I guess the 'fish where the fish are' adage is important...

■ ***There's no lack of individual apps available. What would you recommend as the best integrated innovative platform for brands to use?***

Theis: A very hard question. It depends on what the brand is trying to achieve. If they want to do generic branding, then platforms like Facebook are great. If they really want to immerse with their consumers on a personal level then another approach is required. This is what we are trying to achieve with our trumpet channels.

■ ***Let's talk about other opportunities to expand a brand's presence and gain a competitive edge using digital marketing methods...***

Theis: We have just built an amazing promotions engine, where, for the first time in the world, a brand can track ROI on their mobile advertising in real-time. This involves brands selling their goods through retailers that have their point-of-sale systems linked to the trumpet platform, for example, Brand X wishes to create a campaign through the platform. trumpet offers a variety of promotions, such as a once off discount, progressive discounts (1st 10% off, next 30%), punch card loyalty (every 5th coffee free). Once they have designed their campaign they have the ability to publish the campaign through digital media of their choice e.g. Facebook, SMS, email, websites. trumpet then links the campaign or banner ad to the relevant media. When a consumer clicks on the ad via Facebook, for instance, and presents the promotion to the retailer, the brand will know in real-time the return on the Facebook ad. The brand can also on a real-time basis shift their marketing spend accordingly i.e., SMS is not working, let's move the budget into web. This has never been achievable anywhere in the world and is being used for the first time by large brands such as Coca-Cola in the US. This is done through a multi-patented technology called Sparkfly that is integrated into the trumpet platform. trumpet and Sparkfly have an equity relationship in South Africa.

■ ***Please elaborate on some of the noticeable trends in digital marketing at the moment - now and future...***

Theis: • Businesses are being created simply because of the smartphone. We wouldn't have launched our business if it wasn't for that. They are now down to \$40 for a device that can do almost anything.

- TV consumption - this is going more and more a la carte and immediate. I look at my kids, for instance. They use the TV for the large screen and not for the content. They prefer to search YouTube for their favourite TV programme because it is immediate and without advertising.
- IoT - the [Internet of Things](#) is going to have a profound effect on brands. Every single bar of KitKat can have its own digital personality. By having an [NFC tag](#) in the packaging, the brand can communicate with consumers in an individual way. We are already doing this at trumpet through image recognition. We can load a campaign that if a user scans the bar of chocolate at a UCT campus they will get content that is student- and Cape Town-related. We can geo-locate campaign information down to metres. We are even adapting our platform that allows consumers to personalise the KitKat for their friends e.g. if a friend scanned the chocolate they could be tasked with a challenge of sorts. Individual brand items will have the ability to have their own social media personalities.

■ **List some of the positives of mobile advertising**

Theis: There are a lot of negatives, but on the positive side, mobile advertising can be used to really gamify or immerse with consumers on another level if they use the native functions of smartphones to their fullest - think of a camera's accelerometer or a GPS device.

■ **Conversely, what are some of the challenges for businesses in line with taking their businesses digital? Are there any risks involved?**

Theis: The biggest challenges facing digital marketers in my opinion is how to personalise every customer interaction with relevant experience in a world where they are connected 24/7 and snack in and out of media. That is very challenging. Secondly, how do you then make sense of these streams of data.

■ **Most Africans access the internet on their mobile devices. This leads to the smartphone/feature phone debate. Have enough businesses embraced the idea of digital marketing as an additional channel for their businesses?**

Theis: No, it is still very much an afterthought of what is left of the budget after TV, print, billboards and the like have been accounted for. In Africa, mobile is the primary way of getting digital content yet only 20% of the digital budgets are allocated to it, which I find astounding. Even more astounding is the fact that only about 3% of the total media spend in South Africa is allocated to digital. In the UK it is currently 38% and is predicted to be 50% in the next five years. In the next two to three years most of the economically active population will have a smartphone. Marketers are losing a trick here if digital spend is below 10% in the next couple of years when other markets are above 30%.

Seems we need to pull up our socks when it comes to African advertising strategy, at the very least, whether mobile or otherwise. [Click here](#) for a reminder of DDB's continent-wide success [here](#) and [here for more on trumpet](#).

Click below to watch my raw interview with Theis, conducted over Skype.

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