

Facebook Zero

 By [Mia Scholtz](#)

27 Mar 2014

Social media is part of the very fabric of modern South African society and Facebook is major force within it. Facebook's prominence expanded significantly by the end of 2013 by overtaking Mxit to become the most popular social media platform in South Africa*. Facebook's use has grown by 38%, from 6.8 million active users in 2012 to approximately 9.4 million active users by the end of 2013*. Currently 93% of the top South African brands utilise Facebook as part of their marketing mix*.

The majority of brands measure their success on Facebook mostly by the number of fans their pages have, followed by the number of posts and comments associated with their pages*.

The end of organic reach

What would you say if I told you that in the future your brand's fans (or friends of your fans if fans like your content) would no longer be exposed to your content in the usual manner? I am referring to organic reach. Organic reach is defined as the people who are exposed to your brand's Facebook content, which was not the result of 'paid'. Organic reach surprisingly dropped to 16% in 2012. This trend continued in 2013 and as we speak it is sitting at 6%** . The news is worse for brands that have over 500,000 fans because their organic reach has plummeted to 2% now**. Facebook insiders have unofficially revealed that we should expect organic reach to reach 0% in the future, which I refer to as 'Facebook Zero'.

Facebook's initial appeal for marketers was the ability to build communities of fans, then maintain contact and to promote engagement using content published to fans' news feeds.

So, the possibility of achieving engagement on a large scale motivated many South African brands to invest vast amounts of money developing communities and always-on content.

Now with the end of organic reach in sight, what will be the fall-out for brands who use Facebook to connect with their communities? Will Facebook remain a driver of 'earned' conversation and word-of-mouth? Has Facebook evolved into simply another paid media channel? How should communities approach content and engagement going forward? I will share my insights regarding how South African brands can answer this new challenge.

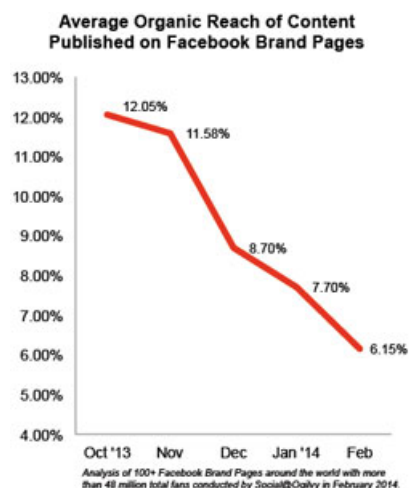
So what actions should you take?

- Hold a workshop with your community managers, editorial leaders, content team and brand leaders to determine how Facebook Zero affects your social strategy.
- Maintain a paid media budget to spend in small increments in order to ensure content reaches advocates and, when appropriate, your whole fan base.
- Develop a paid strategy to divide your existing community so as to effectively target content at advocates and fans who are genuinely interested in it.
- Make harder choices about what to publish. Be prepared to publish less often. Review, revise and refocus on your brand's key storytelling themes. Make sure that these themes deliver against your business objectives. You must be assertive - refuse to publish content that's off-theme, irrelevant or boring.
- Re-evaluate your day-parting strategy. You should publish less because better-targeted content may require that you experiment with different publishing times.
- Consider publishing content a number of times in different day-parts with slight variances. Depending on your audience and their consumption habits, you may be able to use this technique as a useful type of A/B testing to select which form of creative you should boost with 'paid'.

- Make sure that your social media strategy is 'platform neutral', which is derived from your business objectives. Don't be dependent on one particular platform.
- Make use of an editorial approach to content creation. Be sensitive to news and trends that are happening now. Be ready to react and respond appropriately.
- Aggressively engage in cross-platform recruiting. Work to drive Facebook and Twitter followers to websites and other platforms where they can be recruited into CRM databases. Consider database recruitment direct from social platforms.
- When possible, offer users the chance to login to password-only and ecommerce sites with social logins. Doing so makes it easy to harmonise data from social APIs into your CRM database.

Facebook is not simply another 'paid' platform

Facebook has always been at odds between being a 'paid', 'owned' and 'earned' platform. A large number of marketers and community managers see their brand's Facebook page as an 'owned' space. However, this is an illusion because Facebook is perpetually revising the mechanics behind how the platform works. An effective and efficient means of generating 'earned' word-of-mouth is through distributing a brand's Facebook content to fans' news feeds and to non-fans via likes, comments and shares. Facebook's various 'paid' products have assisted with driving brands' community growth, levels of engagement on a greater scale, and a large increase in fan activity.



[click to enlarge](#)

Now, it is simple to see that with organic reach soon being removed from the mix, Facebook will become just another 'paid' channel. This is the case in terms of engaging a brand's existing community, 'paid' support will be required to reach them. However, there is clear evidence that Facebook fans have incremental value. A comScore study found that one retailer's Facebook fans were 27% more likely than a control group to make a purchase in the four weeks following a 'paid' campaign.

Facebook's worth is still its ability to create 'earned' conversation and engagement. To reinforce this fact: 92% of global consumers say that they trust "Recommendations from people I know" and 70% say that they trust "Consumer opinions posted online***."

The new need to distribute content to fans through 'paid' means shouldn't change that. Your brand's fans will continue to see your content in their news feeds and if your

content is interesting, your fans will pass it along to their friends. There is substantial value in this form of content sharing. Research by Nielsen showed that social ads that carry a friend's endorsement ("Your friend John likes Brand X") will generate a 55% higher ad recall than non-social ads.

The way forward

South African brands' Facebook strategies should shift from using 'owned' to drive 'earned'; instead, they should use 'paid' to drive 'earned'. The end of organic reach is a reality now facing every South African brand and business with a presence on the platform. So, marketers need to take specific actions and decisions regarding content planning, 'paid' support for social media activities, audience targeting and much more.

Sources:

* World Wide Worx and Fuseware.

**Marshall Manson - Managing Director (EMEA Region), Social@Ogilvy.

*** Nielsen.

Neo@Ogilvy South Africa

[Neo@Ogilvy](#) is a leading South African digital media buying agency offering turnkey digital media buying, search engine marketing (SEO & PPC), social media marketing and mobile marketing. Neo@Ogilvy is a global market leader; with 800

professionals in 40 offices across 32 countries.

ABOUT MIA SCHOLTZ

Mia Scholtz is MD of Neo@Ogilvy South Africa. Her digital career began at Tiscali UK, the European ISP group. Her first start-up digital agency was Digital Republic, which she operated out of Spain. In 1999, she saw an opportunity in the fast-growing SA online advertising industry and returned to lead the Commercial and Client Services teams at Fuel Group, a part of Asia Digital Holdings plc.
■ Facebook Zero - 27 Mar 2014

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>