

Youth marketing needs to be practical not theoretical

 By Veli Dlamini

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Napoleon Hill once said: "People buy your personality and ideas long before they buy your products and services".

When people love a brand's personality, price becomes the last thing they focus on when buying a product. A typical example is Apple, most of its customers buy into the brand's personality first, company second, products/services third and price last.

Brand personality is the personal identity that stimulates a meaningful emotional response in customers about the qualities or values for which that brand stands.

The face of marketing is slowly changing; today's customers require reciprocal communication with brands. Marketers need to use channels that will allow brands to talk *with* customers, not just talk *at* them.

Do you know your brand personality and are you aware of how your target audience perceive your brand's personality?

While preparing this article I did one-on-one research with the youth at various campuses and shopping malls engaging them on their perception on brands and brand personality.

I had a list with names and logos of twenty brands ranging from FMCG, GSM service providers to technology brands which target the youth. Every young person I engaged with I showed a brand logo, the name and asked them:

"If (Brand name) was a person how would you describe them?"

Here are three examples of what the youth thought on brand personalities of some brands that were on my list:

According to the youth I spoke to, here are their perception of the following brands.

- **Nando's brand personality:** He would be a fun loving person, very smart, opinionated, rebel, he would probably work in the entertainment industry and he would be charming, informed on current affairs.
- **Apple Inc brand personality:** He would be a sophisticated young professional, arrogant, tech savvy, he would probably spend more money on quality products, he would be a workaholic with no social life, financially well off, driving a sports car.
- **NEDBANK brand personality:** He would be in his fifties, boring, divorced and trying to be young again, he would try hard to fit in or to be seen as cool and would have no sense of style.

As I said in my [previous article](#) when it comes to the youth, cool is not something that brands can fake - no matter how much money they invest on radio, print, television, billboards. These platforms only allow you to establish your brand's voice not brand personality.

Cool is not a self proclaimed title, but it's giving to your brand, based on impact, perception and relevance in youth culture.

The single most important step in building a winning brand personality in the youth space is accepting that what you think of your brand is almost irrelevant: What matters is the perception the youth has of your brand.

What is really intriguing to me is that most advertising agencies are given accolades at awards ceremonies by industry experts for "successful" campaigns. However, in reality some of those brands fail to establish an impactful brand personality with their target market.

Marketers need to be practical when marketing to the youth

I think it's time that marketers become pragmatic in their marketing strategies as opposed to relying on marketing textbook theories. For example, marketers who graduated ten years ago, probably read marketing books and got exposed to solutions that were relevant to marketing challenges that were faced by brands ten years ago.

Today brands are communicating to a different kind of a consumer, therefore our approach in marketing and our strategies need to be practical. Instead of spending money on "brand amplification" rather spend your budget establishing your brand personality. The youth is not interested in talking to a logo on social media and they won't even try to decode your creative billboard message on the highway.

It is baffling that most brands spend millions on marketing campaigns that make no impact in the culture of their target audiences.

As a marketer when I looked at the responses we got from the youth regarding brand personality or perception on brands it hit me by virtue of a brand's personality it almost attracts customers with similar personality traits as the brand (values, detail to quality and beliefs).

Social media marketing: KISS the youth (keep it short and simple)

Brands that will always win on social media marketing are brands that have personalities. At the end of it all successful social media activation is not just focused on what you say and how you say it, it's about the personality of the brand that makes it easier for the youth to be open in interacting with the brand.

Here is a scenario: guy walks to girl and says: "You see that Porsche Carrera, it's mine and I have money to spend. Want to be my girl?"

In this scenario one of two things will happen, the girl will either blow off the guy or she will lead the guy on just to get luxurious benefits from the guy.

When brands engage with the youth on social media their approach is the same as the guy in the above mentioned scenario. They will either post pictures of their products or run "Like" our page competitions with a promise of a prize. What may happen is either the youth blows off the brand or they "participate" with a clear expectation of material gain, some free products and winnable competition prizes.

When it comes to social media marketing marketers need to have clearly defined objectives on why they are going on social networks and importantly what personality they want their brands to project. Defining your brand personality will make it easier to align your brand voice with engagement objectives. However apart from defined objectives marketers need to take cognizance of the youth subculture elements to make it easier for the brand to engage youth on relevant topics. There's nothing wrong with being a bit off topic from time to time as long as you're giving your Facebook page fans or Twitter followers content they will enjoy.

Being relevant is very much key for your brand to cut it in the online space, this means active participants in online discussions on issues and topics of interest to the youth, therefore the brand needs to be informed on a variety of subject matters. This doesn't mean that your brand should talk about everything under the sun, if your brand personality objective is to be perceived as a brand of success or progressive lifestyle. Your information or topics need to be current and interesting, for example updating your fans on Grammy Award winners as they happen. After all, social networks don't close office at 5pm. Brands that are only active on social media during office hours will miss out on the opportunity of relevance.

Out of the box thinking

Marketers and their creative teams need to stop thinking out of the box and start thinking from inside the youth culture. Social media is a reciprocal platform, it allows for a dialogue between a brand and a consumer. If you don't know the culture of the youth how will you relate to your target audience and what will you talk about besides yourself?

What is the point of spending millions of rands putting together a creatively produced or humorous TV advert for it to make sense only to the internal team but miss the mark on the intended audience?

The youth being loyal to your brand

When coming with objectives don't put brand loyalty as your main objective because you will be disappointed with the result. Today's youth is not loyal to any brands; they consume brands and products that are hip and happening. If a brand is cool and relevant in their culture they will jump on the wagon and even go as far as being an official "spokesperson" of that brand in their circle. In theory, brands can achieve brand loyalty but in reality the youth chants behind brands that are hip and relevant. Once that brand loses relevance or when another brand becomes hip they will jump ship and go for the relevant brand. In a nutshell, youth of today are only loyal for as long as the brand is cool and relevant.

The youth growing with your brand

This is the most interesting one, if marketers put the marketing textbooks down or break free from their marketing professor's teaching, they will realize that the youth only grows with a brand in theory. However, being practical opens your eyes to the fact that the youth are bound to outgrow your brand instead. The chances of the youth growing with your brand are very slim: Think of yourself when you were in your teens, think of the brands you loved, the products you consumed: Fast forward to today, do you still wear the same brand of clothes or perhaps drink the same beverages or even use the same brand of mobile phone? Chances are the products that you use today or that are more appealing to you are probably brands that were "aspirational" to you back in your teen years.

Points to remember regarding impactful brand personality

- In a nutshell, brand personality is not achieved through theory, but practical strategies that are relevant to the youth.
- When the strategy is right and communication is reciprocal brand personality will develop brand equity and set the brand attitude.
- Having the right personality will add value into the look and feel of any communication or marketing activity the brand may endeavour.
- Relevant brand personality will assist marketers to gain in depth comprehension of customers feelings pertaining to the brand.

In my next article I will talk more on how brand owners and advertising agencies can get their brands in the culture of the youth through word of mouth. Imperatively I will share strategies on how marketing or account executives can get their brands to be "top of mind" in the youth culture.

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