

How LinkedIn is changing the integrated communication landscape

 By Leigh Andrews

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If you're leaving your company's social media communications to one department to handle, you're missing out on a great opportunity to punt individuals as experts - here's Text 100's take.

Global Communications

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There's no doubt that social media has forever changed the way individuals communicate, but it's also revolutionised the way the B2B industry works. I spoke to Lars Basche, the EMEA digital lead for Text 100, about the state of integrated communications and how we can all become more effective sales people for the companies we work for, no matter what our actual job title or the specific industry we cover...

■ What does 'integrated communication' really mean?

Basche: It's about integration on two levels: First, it's about using different media platforms in your communications strategy, including earned, which is mainly traditional media relations and, in addition to journalists, dealing with bloggers and other influencers; owned, meaning all platforms that brands really own including website, corporate blogs; social, a brand's social media platforms on Facebook, Twitter and the like; as well as paid; traditional; and all newer forms of social media and digital advertising. Companies need to think about all these different types of media because of the user behaviour within a typical decision-making process. For example, a decision maker in the IT industry is using different sources of information in different stages of the process. This is something companies need to be aware of and need to react on.



Lars Basche, EMEA digital lead for Text 100

What companies need to keep in mind though is the second level on integration - that it's also about organisational integration. When it comes to digital communications, it's not only about PR and marketing anymore, it's also about sales and customer service, for example. This means you need to make sure your entire company is involved and that all departments understand what you're doing in order to better communicate the message, whenever they communicate.

■ Does the state of SA's integrated communication compare to that of the rest of the EMEA region?

Basche: This is a 'yes' and 'no' answer. Our colleagues and clients often think South Africa is behind the rest, but that's not

necessarily the case. It's more a case of there being little motivation to experiment. If you look at the US for example, they just go and do it, and in Germany, they plan a lot, but in the end it's all about the level of willingness to experiment.

■ ***Audiences are increasingly more complex and have varied needs. Does this make it harder to target specific behaviour and responses?***

Basche: Yes, to an extent. But I think that this actually isn't that much different from the past. The audiences' needs have always been complex but what's different now is that there are a lot of channels that people use and that companies can choose to engage with their audiences. Decision-makers can use different sources to help them make a decision, from typing something into Google or asking their colleagues and friends. The advantage now is that this could be public as it was a more private process in the past, and it's easier for sales people to be aware of this and get in touch with people that are relevant to them and to position themselves as experts by talking about relevant topics. This makes it harder to have a consistent and controlled communication strategy across the board, but provides a great opportunity if your employees are adequately prepped. That's one of the important new roles of the communications departments: It's about enabling colleagues to use digital channels for their individual purposes and to integrate this into their day-to-day work.

■ ***Social media is so pervasive we now see it as a 'concurrent' task, where we're on social media while doing other things, like watching TV or even working...***

Basche: Yes - it's more about punting your own experience. We often watch two if not three screens at the same time so there's a high level of distraction, and we get up to do something else in the ad breaks. On the other hand, we don't factor in that many watch TV on their third device or mobile phone too, so figures on TV advertising reach are potentially all wrong.

■ ***How can clients across the insurance, legal, financial service, mining and technology sectors take advantage of social media, and what specific challenges do they face as they're seen as more 'formal' sectors?***

Basche: These are more serious fields of business, sure, but don't forget that we're all human beings - social at that, so social does play a role in the more formal sectors. Everyone in sales, in any industry, has the opportunity to build their own community online. For these sectors, this is especially possible through LinkedIn, which helps you share your knowledge and keep in touch with relevant people online. It's about using external communication to enable this new way of communicating, and allowing everyone in your company to access social media, this shouldn't be the domain of just one department. In terms of measuring your social media impact, keep in mind that it's not just about the pure numbers, like followers on Twitter or your LinkedIn network. It's more about reaching the right people, specific stakeholder groups. So in essence, it's about quality rather than quantity, especially in the business-to-business realm.

■ ***Most of us make use of LinkedIn without a second thought. How is LinkedIn in particular becoming increasingly slick in monetising offerings specifically tailored to the way people sell?***

Basche: LinkedIn has definitely changed the face of business, particularly over the past year. It serves as a model for optimal integrated communication as it's virtually an online address book, with the added benefit of seeing when a person has an updated job title or works at a new company. In addition, LinkedIn provides a way to make money by integrating content, simplifying recruiters' jobs and tapping into content that can be used in a different way as a blogging platform. It's not just about short 'tweet-length' content but also an opportunity to distribute and create relevant content to relevant people and groups in order to strengthen relationships and your reputation as a thought leader. So it's a good idea to update your profile regularly as you acquire new skills or a new role, and also using the content distribution options so that you can use this as a form of leads-generating sales tool, whether you're in sales or not.

Watch the video embedded below on how best to use LinkedIn as a business:

■ **How can companies best integrate different ways of selling across their entire workforce to ensure they are most effective in selling themselves?**

Basche: The best way is by enabling the sales force to use social media, as I keep mentioning, but not as a big task to build up to, rather as a form of personal, day-to-day work life. Most people love to talk about themselves online, so we can use this to change how people sell. People also go looking for expertise online, which can help drive certain business structures, and ultimately change the way we communicate. All you need to do is position yourself as an expert to the whole industry, not just your own company. Don't think of it as 'selling stuff' - it's in small talk that the true sales conversation happens.

■ **What has 2014 been like for Text 100, and what do you see as the next big trends for 2015?**

Basche: In 2014, we have seen a great interest among our clients in integrated communications, including all types of content and platforms into your external communications strategy. We have also seen a growing interest in the second level of integration mentioned above, integrating all relevant business departments. I believe this will be one of the main topics for the coming year: More and more companies in South Africa and also in Europe understand that it's not just about PR or marketing when it comes to social media, it's also important to have a strategy across all departments including sales, customer service as well as HR.

Lots to think about, B2B LinkedIn users. For more on integrated communications, follow the [global Text100 Twitter account](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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