

Give your brand a marketing boost with A-Listers

 By Leigh Andrews

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Looking to break into the lucrative African market? The key may lie in a new online directory with the power of social network functionality that links your brand to African celebrities. [Click through to A-Listers](#), says founder, Laura Eboa Songue...



Laura Eboa Songue



Brands are a funny beast that often struggle to gain traction and trust in new markets. Breaking into the [African market](#) in particular can be tricky if you don't yet have a presence there.

But research proves that one of the best ways to build a following with the masses is to have a well-known spokesperson back your brand - think of all the actresses and sportsmen who do so.

That's why Laura Eboa Songue, co-owner of media company [Fashizblack](#), decided to venture into new waters with the launch of A-Listers.

The website is aesthetically pleasing and a piece of cake to navigate, and the [initial press release](#) about the launch of this 'matchmaker' service intrigued me, so I contacted Songue and we delved into the details...

Firstly, why was A-Listers started?

Songue: It was a combination of several things. The initial idea originated from the 2014 World Cup. I'm from Cameroon and our team had a horrible competition, both on and off the field. I had several conversations with friends, and people connected to the team to try figure out how it was possible to have such a poor PR and brand management strategy for the players.

Added to this, I co-own a media company called Fashizblack so I'm very familiar with everything related to African pop culture and knew there was a real gap there in terms of celebrity marketing. From being able to reach out to celebrities, to handling the legal hassle and building the best strategies, I really wanted to create a tool that would be an accelerator and a hub.



The A-Listers' log in screen

■ Tell us a little bit more about it... how exactly does A-Listers work? How does it tie together the B2B, social network and agency aspects?

Songue: We wanted it to be pretty simple and efficient. Celebrities and brands sign up to different sections on [the website](#). Then, they have to fill up their profile with their key information such as their social media information, interests, press and

awards, so that all their achievements are easily accessible on their page. It's like a mini media kit.

Brands are then able to reach out to celebrities for endorsements, social media pushes, corporate bookings and more by messaging them. It's a B2B social network because it's only crafted for commercial transactions between celebrity influencers and brands.

As an agency, we help both parties with any strategy consulting, legal and branding services they may need.

■ ***Certainly a handy service! How can people harness the power of A-Listers?***

Songue: I think the platform will become really powerful when we have more members. It's the added value of the internet, the ability to aggregate all the data, and create connections in real time, very easily. At this point, we're really encouraging people to subscribe to the site so they can test the platform out.

■ ***What's response been like since launch?***

Songue: People really like this idea and this concept. However, it is still challenging to get people to subscribe so we really have to sell the concept to celebrities and brands because some of them are still reluctant. As a new project, it's totally understandable so we have to keep on pushing; we believe it will be a tremendous tool for both parties.

■ ***Has going Beta had a big impact?***

Songue: So far, so good. We have personalities like South African powerhouses Minnie Dlamini and Itumeleng Khune to Ivory Coast rap sensation Kiff No Beat, with other talents are set to join the platform like superstar singer Lira (South Africa), iconic artist Awilo Longomba (Congo), Samuel Eto'o (Cameroon) or supermodel Betty Adewole (Nigeria/UK).



Supermodel Betty Adewole

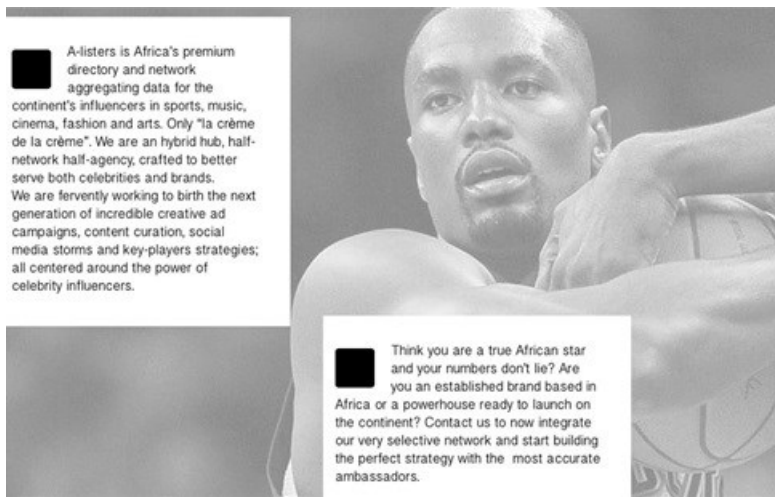
■ ***Big names indeed. How does celebrity/luxury marketing differ from traditional marketing methods?***

Songue: Celebrity marketing is all about using a well-known person and his/her fame to help promote a product or service. It's not necessarily luxury marketing either, except if the product or service belongs in the luxury industry. It's all about using traditional methods and create a cohesive strategy around the celebrity image. I think the most important thing is to not use any celebrity at any cost just for the sake of it. It should really work only if the celebrity has the right influence and position for the brand.

■ ***Let's talk about the state of African celebrity marketing compared to the Western world that floods our social media streams...***

Songue: It is growing at a tremendous rate, but I think it lacks structure and there are huge gaps depending on the countries and the state of their respective entertainment industries. For example, in Nigeria, there is a plethora of celebrity endorsement deals made each year, which shows that pop culture is very strong there but I definitely think that some deals make no sense. You can have celebrities with 10 deals that have no sort of consistency in regards to their image, talent and core values. Or brands picking up 15 ambassadors but again, there's no cohesiveness or clear strategy. It looks like everybody is running towards a good profit but there is no constancy.

On the other hand, most countries, especially, the French-speaking ones, are not anywhere near that kind of celebrity marketing... and again, I believe it goes hand in hand with the slower development of their celebrity culture.



Screenshot from the A-Listers' website

■ ***I've noticed you make use of social media to promote the A-Listers, can you talk us through your own marketing strategy?***

Songue: As a young start-up, social network is key to get the word out but most importantly, it really helped us to reach out to certain celebrities or to get the right information about some brands.

We are currently using [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and LinkedIn and it's been super helpful.

■ ***What's next for A-Listers?***

Songue: As I mentioned before, the priority is recruiting both celebrities and brands. We will continue to improve the platform technically. Also, I really want to launch a sister website for charity organisations to access celebrities and connect with them to promote many great causes. Celebrity marketing with a purpose - that would be amazing.

■ ***What trends do you see as the biggest to come in 2015?***

Songue: I think authentic and organic influencer engagement will grow. Brands are definitely aware of the power of influencers when it comes to social engagement, celebrity culture and their commitment they have to their own communities. They definitely want to create genuine and organic conversation to attract new consumers or create deeper connections with current customers. A-Listers.org and celebrity marketing are great tools to do it.

For more on A-Listers, follow their [Twitter profile](#).

PS: If you're looking to keep things local, click here for a reminder of [South Africa's favourite online celebs...](#)

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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