

To succeed with youth on social media, let them be part of the brand's story

 By [Ernst Wittmann](#)

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South Africa's first digital-native generation is coming of age, and it's changing the rules for marketers. Some 41% of South Africans are younger than 22 years old and have grown up with smartphones and social media, so they have different perceptions of marketing to Generation Xers and baby boomers.



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They have higher expectations from brands in terms of the personalisation, interactivity and immediacy. They don't want to simply be passive consumers of brand messages and content. South African youth are resistant to traditional advertising, have short attention spans, and value experiences over physical possessions.

They also want to have their say and be part of the story. GfK research shows that 76% of South African Generation Z respondents would be more loyal to a brand that lets them give input or help shape its products and services. This market is critical to brand expansion and growth. Generation Z represents a significant pool of purchasing power as they subsequently have influence over what parents and guardians buy too.

Here are some ways brands can effectively use social media to reach this mobile-first generation.

Think content, not platform

Much like their parents, the youth gravitate towards content that meets their needs because it is relevant to their lives. As such, brands don't need a Snapchat or Facebook strategy, but a strategy that meets the audience's needs with the right content for the context. Some environments lend themselves to marketing engagements better than others.

For example, some marketers and many teens think of Facebook as being a bit old-school, however, the platform has rich data, powerful targeting tools and high-quality analytics that can help brands to drive deeper engagement with their audiences. By contrast, South African teens ranked WhatsApp as their favourite app in the *Sunday Times* Generation Next survey for 2017, yet it lacks mature tools for advertisers.



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Keep it short

Young social media users multitask across several apps and screens at a time, so a brand needs to learn how to capitalise on grasping those micro-moments available to them. Short posts and bite-size videos will get them engaging with the content — especially if the content is funny, useful and personalised to their needs.

Remember, you're the intruder

Digital natives see advertising as an interruption and annoyance. Brands that place content and advertising on social platforms need to show they are adding value. A hard sales approach is a turn-off. Content needs to be appealing and valuable in its own right. It's about starting a conversation and building a relationship, trusting that the sales will follow.

Be flexible

The biggest challenge in youth marketing is that the audience's interests and preferences change frequently and suddenly. Marketers need to stay in touch with the market through constant research. What are the latest trends in fashion and entertainment? What are the cool new apps? Which brands are resonating right now?

Authenticity matters

Authenticity is a hard quality to define, but most people know it when they see it. Brands that are successful with the youth:

- are transparent in how they deal with their audiences
- don't talk down to younger consumers
- don't come across like a Dad trying to talk and act like a teenager.

Telling stories about the brand and having a sincere purpose helps to make it more trustworthy.

Listen and engage

Younger customers are content creators, not just content consumers. They want to be part of the story and they want to feel like their opinions are heard. It's important to listen, to let them comment, to help them share, and to show that you hear them.

ABOUT ERNST WITTMANN

Ernst Wittmann is Global Account Director MEA & Country Manager - Southern Africa, at TCL Communications
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