

The year of the audience

By [Lebo Madiba](#)

19 Jan 2016

Audiences are now getting their news from social media platforms rather than from traditional or even online platforms, and it is important for clients to understand that the audience is at the centre of the conversation.

It means that the digital integration of messaging is essential. If this is done successfully, messaging on social media platforms can be used to raise awareness and drive audiences to more in-depth content, both in print and online.



Mining 'big data' will become more important

Clients and agencies need to acknowledge and use the value of 'big data', and I see this becoming a lot more important to effectiveness. This will be essential to understand what motivates different audiences, rather than just assuming that people in certain demographic segments all act the same. Brands that target audiences based on a mindset and values will come out on top.

In line with this, we'll see increasingly sophisticated and age-agnostic content, which targets very specific audiences.

The time investment in mining 'big data' will be an excellent investment because, although the data is there, we're currently not using it as effectively as we could. The benefit of mining data for lifestyle characteristics will also lead to a better understanding of which channels to use in order to reach different audiences.

Content absolutely has to be in real time

Audiences are online and engaged all the time. This means that responses need to be genuine and in real time as auto-speak on social media and other online platforms is easy to spot. This means that clients and agencies alike need to rely less on content calendars when planning their communications and need to commit to putting guts into their online engagements.

This, however, will require upskilling. The point of contact between brands and the audiences that are generating content is on such thin ice that it means those responsible for conversations about brands need to be brilliant minds. In short, they need to be able to engage in real time while still maintaining brand integrity, strategy and tone. Planning to be appropriately spontaneous gives audiences the authenticity they now demand from their brands.

The advent of the corporate meme

In a similar vein, almost every big story that broke in 2015 was quickly followed by a rash of social media memes. Digital and social media have blurred the lines between PR, advertising, promotion and branded content, so marketers are likely to latch onto this trend and develop their own corporate memes.

Always ahead of the pack, Nando's recently did this by dropping a meme slap-bang into the middle of an online conversation. It was targeted, it was done in real time and it wasn't a case of 'one size fits all'. The meme was meant for a specific audience that would understand and relate to it - and could be leveraged across multiple platforms in a seamless way.

Social activism will be hard to ignore

2015 certainly had its share of social ills, from the ISIS terrorist attacks to Donald Trump's potential Presidential candidacy and, at home, from the ills of President Jacob Zuma's presidency to the iconic #FeesMustFall campaign. And, while it has always been the norm for brands to put distance between themselves and social, political and religious issues, the fact is that audiences are drawing them into the wider debate.

It will therefore be essential for brands to carefully define their position on such issues so that they are not caught off-guard. Those that are slow to respond to rapidly trending matters will find themselves in the line of fire with little or no protection.

PR will continue to stand strong

The strength of PR has always been its ability to engage directly with specific audiences and to build relationships with them. This is a skill that is needed now more than ever, especially as engagement is moving so rapidly to encompass the social media.

This will demand a layering of content across multiple platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, the company's website, the traditional media and corporate memes; all of which will need to contribute in an integrated way to building a storyline for the brand. This means that PR agencies and consultancies will need to work carefully with client marketing departments and their advertising agencies in order to ensure that all touch-points are leveraged.

2016 will be an exciting time to be in PR as the industry continues to adjust and reposition itself in relation to the many changes taking place in the communications environment.

ABOUT LEBO MADIBA

Lebo Madiba is Managing Director and Founder of PRPowerhouse, a boutique consultancy that prides itself on delivering innovative solutions to its clients' PR needs.

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