

# What do global brands need to know about the SA social media market?

 By Emma Glover

23 Jan 2017

As an English girl living in South Africa for the last year, I have noticed stark differences in the ways brands and their audiences behave online. Not only are the content themes noticeably different to the European way of thinking, but the ways in which the audience communicates with a brand online shows patterns of behaviour that are much more dominant than in other countries around the world.

From experiencing social media from both sides of the globe, I have realised how naïve I was and how much I had to learn as a foreigner coming into a sensitive yet passionate environment. That is why I have put together the following tips for global brands looking to break into the South African market in the near future.

## Sensitivity

Whilst it's okay to agenda surf and explore relevant issues in the current economy, it should be handled sensitively. Not all brands can get away with being witty and controversial – if your brand already has a tone and brand CI in place, try not to deter from that just because you are entering a new market. Within an unpredictable political and economic environment coupled with poor quality leadership, South Africans can react sensitively to brands that push unnecessary boundaries – and rightly so.



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This doesn't mean you can't have fun with your content tone – brands like Nando's South Africa have found their place in the market from understanding South African humour, so do your homework!

## Passion

South Africans are extremely passionate both about their country and everything it stands for. The online community is unafraid to speak its mind so make sure to have a strong community management team in place to allow for this. Don't be afraid of their desire to engage, it can create a much more trusting relationship with the brand if you get to know your audience and it stands for.

## Culture

South Africa has 11 official languages and many different cultural differences that are equally respected and practiced. Try and appeal to all rather than segregation but do not attempt to explore alternatives to English without thorough research into spellings, grammar, meanings and best practice. Don't be the brand that tries to fit in. If you want to use other languages in your copy, speak to an expert, find out if the messaging you are trying to portray is suited to your chosen phrase and do so only where necessary. Respect cultural differences by getting to know them, not by partaking in guess-work.

## Climate

With a temperamental financial market and leadership, it's important that your product or service is presented as a welcome solution and not a financial burden. When creating a content plan, take into account where country sits on service needs as well as appealing to the wider market and not a narrow selection.

This may sound obvious but it is also vital to make sure your images portray diversity as well as taking into account the climate at the time of your campaigns. Global brands don't always get this right. Northern hemisphere weather differs drastically to the climate in SA, and it is important that any visuals show a South African perspective on your brand.

## Politics

South Africans are extremely politically savvy and not easily manipulated. This therefore means they do not easily trust or invest into a brand if they cannot see benefit. You have to sell your service as experience. Look into what your service or product can do to enhance your customers lives, not just plying them with a buzz-word filled sales pitch. How will your product help and why should they pick yours over a global brand?

## Individualisation

The main message is to do your research! What works for one country may not work for the next. South Africa has worked extremely hard to develop its independence and individualisation which gives it a distinct identity to the rest of the world.

So from the English girl emerged in the South African way of life, I say embrace their passion and zest for life, be attentive to their social media needs and answer all their questions, because the South African online market has the perfect balance of cynicism, knowledge and inquisitiveness that makes digital content strategy exciting again.

## ABOUT EMMA GLOVER

Emma Glover is Head of Content at GGI Communications, Johannesburg. Gillian Gamsy International is a leading integrated communications company, focusing on PR, social and digital. Its experience over 34 years spans reputation management, crisis communications, corporate and consumer PR, social media and digital, across a broad range of local and global industries and sectors.

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