

Using Instagram to pinpoint the magic of South Africa

 By Leigh Andrews

8 Dec 2014

By doing some quick-thinking, Cerebra CEO Craig Rodney, turned the optimal Instagram handle of [@SouthAfrica](#) into one of the best-marketed local Instagram accounts...

Working for Cerebra's fun in itself, says Craig Rodney, but in true over-achiever fashion, he says he "loves busy days" as he gets more done on them. And so, he's also taken on the [@SouthAfrica](#) account on Instagram. Some would see this as a full-time job and then some - to Rodney, it's "just a hobby."

Rodney talks to us about how he got hold of the [@SouthAfrica](#) handle and other cool stuff happening in the Instagram space at the moment.



Submitted to the #SouthAfrica hashtag on Instagram by [@animal_ocean](#)

He's been on Instagram himself since the end of 2010 with his [personal account](#) as he's always been into photography and the visual story-telling side of things. Last year he decided to take this further when he decided that South Africa has lots to offer - so much so that it needs its own profile - and not in the way of the [parody mountain Twitter accounts](#) I wrote about last week, but rather as there's such a rich opportunity to market the country on the platform, which no-one was doing.

Rodney does his research and hits pay dirt with the [@SouthAfrica](#) Instagram account

Rodney decided [@SouthAfrica](#) would be the optimal handle, so he checked whether it was taken - and found that it was. However, he's nothing if not resourceful, so had a look at the profile and found just a handful of selfies uploaded by someone unknown. Chancing his luck he left a comment on the most recent image then forgot about it as there was no reply. Fast-forward three months and Rodney noted he'd received an email response in the morning from the lady who owned the [@SouthAfrica](#) account asking for his email address, which he commented back to her. On his ride to work he started thinking what she would charge him to take control of the username and what it might be worth to him. Luckily, when he got to work there was an email waiting with the username, password and a note saying that she'd already deleted her

photos and changed the account over to my email address. The account had become annoying to the original owner - she had enjoyed South Africa while on a holiday here so much so she deemed it the most beautiful place she'd been to and so chose it as an Instagram name, and had since been tagged in any image showcasing the beauty of the country.



Submitted to the #SouthAfrica hashtag on Instagram by @pintographia

And so Rodney took over the reins and using @SouthAfrica to feature beautiful photos - not his own, but those of other Instagrammers. He did so to make the account a home of sorts for "cool SA stories", and always gives a credit or caption to the original photographer, stating that he simply won't use the pic if he can't credit the original photographer. He initially featured one per day, making it 365 beautiful photos in the first year, which he did first thing in the morning. He soon changed his strategy on finding that people have a larger appetite for images, so has upped the amount to two or three per day. As part of the typical 'chicken/egg' conundrum, he's finding that the quality of images people submit to the #SouthAfrica hashtag is constantly on the rise now.

Increase in followers, #SouthAfrica submissions and overall quality

He adds that the account grows organically, with no added effort from his side, at 35k followers at the time I interviewed him and up to 37,000 followers at the time of publishing, that's no mean feat and Rodney admits no other South African Instagram accounts featuring images of the country have as many legitimate followers.

Response from Instagrammers has been amazing, with Rodney stating that he puts a massive amount of love and passion

into choosing the photos he features, and gets just as much love and passion back with up to 2,500 likes per photo some days. One of his Instagram highlights came in May this year, with the national elections South Africa's top event at the time. Rodney decided to feature this by running a #VoteSA campaign, in which he promoted the hashtag by co-opting people in the community to tell their voting story in pictures for the @SouthAfrica account to feature the best. It launched on 6 May, the day before the elections, and resulted in 6,000 photos being tagged in just 12 hours. He featured his favourite 12 photos on the day, and engagement went through the roof.



Submitted to the #SouthAfrica hashtag on Instagram by @thatchriswessels

Rodney says it's important to note that only 40% of the account's followers are based in South Africa. The rest are definitely not all expats either, although a large amount of comments left on the photos are along the lines of "I miss home," with a growing number of foreign-language comments too. It therefore serves as a great destination marketing tool with no comparison. The tourism angle is 'unreal', with comments asking where the pics were taken if the location doesn't appear - Rodney says this is proof of the way people build mental itineraries of places they'd like to travel by browsing Instagram.

It's not just about the great scenery though, as Rodney says people respond just as well to images of wildlife such as Great White sharks and cheetah kills. This is the very essence of Africa and people respond well to shots of nature that promote the country.



Submitted to the #South Africa hashtag on Instagram by @MldScotty

Of course things aren't going to stagnate though, as Rodney says there are great things to come with his ambitious plans for the account - if the formula is right there's room for improvement, he says, the opportunity to tell richer stories, so it shouldn't just be visually appealing but without polluting the purpose of the page in telling the story of the amazing country we live in.

"As long as it adds value to people's days and makes them feel as positive as I do, there's nothing better," Rodney concludes. Don't forget to follow the [@SouthAfrica](#) Instagram account.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at [@Leigh_Andrews](#).

- #Loeries2020: Behavioural economics as creativity, but not as we know it... - 24 Nov 2020
- #D2020: Ignite your inner activist - representation through illustration - 27 Feb 2020
- #D2020: How Sho Madjozi brought traditional Tsonga *xibelelani* into 2020 - 27 Feb 2020
- #D2020: Silver jubilee shines with Department of Audacious Projects launch - 26 Feb 2020
- #BehindtheSelfie with... Qingqile 'WingWing' Mdlulwa, CCO at The Whole Idea - 26 Feb 2020

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>