

Giving your brand the "cool factor" in 2013 (part I)

 By Veli Dlamini

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There have been many articles written about why brands should engage with the youth on social networks. My article however, aims to establish how brands can capitalise on the culture youth deem as being "cool". I will also touch on the strategies that can help brands leverage this culture to gain the "Cool Factor".

In 2012 we saw the music branding partnerships trend in South Africa and its impact on the online and offline space grow. The following brands, in my opinion, had an impact on the youth culture through partnering with celebrities and music:

- Castle Lite (Feel The Beat of Sub Zero)
- Black Label (Be The Champion Coach)
- Vodacom (Vodacom Unlimited Experience)
- Castle Milk Stout (CMS Unplugged events)
- Hansa Pilsner (Just Dream/15 Seconds Of Fame) etc.

Through partnering with celebrities and music, these brands penetrated the culture, amplifying their brand personality to remain top of mind and relevant to their target audience.

Whether it be in the financial or advertising industry, there's only one primary instrument that is used to measure success, it's called "Numbers". All industries use the same measuring instrument and the greater the numbers, the greater the smile to the bank.

The growth of interactive media has created a new currency on how mutually beneficial partnerships between brands and music/celebrities are achieved in a digital era; this also transcends platforms in the online and offline worlds.

Here are some numbers to chew on:

At the time of writing this article Justin Bieber had wowed his way to the top of the Twitter ranks. According to data from Twitter Counter, a website that monitors Twitter activities, Justin Bieber's account is sitting on 33.38 million fans who follow his every tweet - Bieber has past fellow singer Lady Gaga with 33.36 million followers.

Other international celebrities with a large following:

Singer Katy Perry took third place with 31.5 million followers, followed by Rihanna with 27.9 million. President Barack Obama won the fifth spot with 26.2 million, while Britney Spears dropped to sixth place with 23.3 million.

Local celebrities twitter followers:

Even though none of the local celebrities have reached the million followers mark, their accounts are growing tremendously. Comedian Trevor Noah is leading the race with 659 790 followers, 5FM breakfast host Gerath Cliff with 401 140 followers, Radio and TV presenter Bonang Matheba 340 106 followers, club Dj and radio presenter on 5FM DJ Fresh with 313 791 followers and TV presenter Mini Dlamini with 206 089 followers.

Brands and celebrity partnerships are imperative, especially now that modern technology affords the advertising world new ways to connect with prospective customers, as well as music enthusiasts. At the end of the day, both the brand and celebrities/artists tend to share one overlapping similarity: Both need to connect with people at the right time to reap the rewards.

What makes celebrities and musicians the "cool" kids?

Sometimes it's not only the huge marketing budget or campaign strategy that guarantees brand recall and impact on your campaign. The single most important step in building an effective brand activation or campaign in the youth space is accepting that what you think of your brand is nearly irrelevant: What matters is the perception the youth has of your brand.

Cool people are seen in the circle of other cool people - it all boils down to who knows your brand and what their social class or influence is in their circle. Celebrities and musicians can add so much value to the brand campaign encoding stage.

My reasoning for saying this is simply because the brand is trying to reach the target audience in the culture where celebrities are regarded as ring leaders or trendsetters. Celebrities are more in touch with the youth market than "Mathew or Ntombi" who are office bound, in a 9am to 5pm at a fancy office park.

How brands can leverage celebrities influence in culture 2013

Matching the right talent/celebrity with the right brand, based on shared values, aligned objectives and, ideally, a balanced exchange of assets, can translate to good ROI for brands. However, failure to ensure the talent/celebrity loves the brand or is really interested in getting to know your brand may lead to a case of "doom and gloom" for the campaign, with no impact on the culture.

There is nothing worse than someone endorsing something they either know nothing about or clearly have zero enthusiasm for. The brand needs to ensure that the celebrity/talent uses their personal channels and social networks to amplify the partnership. This gives both additional reach and, more importantly, shows consumers that the brand and the personality have connected at a deeper level.

Important points to remember:

1. Understand the shared values between the artist and brand.
2. Figure out what the commonality is that the consumer believes so the partnership is natural and it doesn't seem like it's forced.
3. Today's consumers are very smart, they will know when the relationship is forced and instead of having a positive effect, the brand could be viewed negatively.
4. Celebrity power is subjective, but brand power is ultimately measured by increased sales and an authentic representation of the brand in culture.

In part two of Giving your brand the "cool factor" in 2013 I will talk more about how brands can leverage culture and I will also share a story on why some brands become more popular than others in youth culture.

To be continued...

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