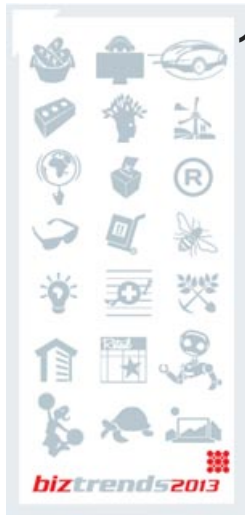


Seven youth-influencer outreach insights

 By [Mongezi Mlati](#)

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In 2012, brands asked some pertinent and challenging questions pertaining to influencer outreach and seeding their products. Insights gained both as a delegate and a speaker at a number of enlightening conferences over the past year have led me to the following observations about what brands want and how Africa's youth prefer to be communicated with - from a marketing and advertising perspective.



1. Context

The era of using multiple platforms as fads and buzzwords that were mentioned at a conference is slowly phasing itself out. Africa is in search of its own solutions and, with that, it has become evident that forward-thinking developers are working with brands to contextualise marketing and influencer outreach efforts.

Young customers have realised that just because things work in other parts of the world (think the West), it doesn't mean they work in Africa. Your customers need you to understand them better.

The more that brands succeed in implementing strategies that demonstrate an understanding of their customer base, the more their competitors will lag behind. If anything, 2013 will be the year of context - which far surpasses platforms. After all, chances are that your customer uses more than one platform and the last thing you want to do is to spam them.

2. In search of remarkable

In 2011, in the midst of music piracy and woes of people no longer buying CDs, Zahara's 'Loliwe' was one of the most-played songs on radio and television. She went on to become one of the most celebrated artists in South Africa, and arguably Africa.

The youth is still in search of people and brands who are remarkable at what they do and how they engage with their customers. The idea of segmenting people by demographic, therefore by what they are most likely to want, is getting turned on its head because of the age of connectedness.

If brands that were remarkable in their offering were talked about in 2012, 2013 will see those conversations quadruple. Brace yourself to analyse Big Data.

3. Collaborate

Influential young people perceive themselves as brands, not just "another customer" in an endless of numbers defined by age, income and preferred platforms of engagement. There are some brands (including some of the larger, global brands) that customers see as unreachable. One of the things the youth market appreciates, in the brands they love, is the idea of collaboration between them and their favourite brands.

In 2012, Vodacom and Cerebra hosted a small and intimate breakfast, with about 30 people in the room, where the CEO of Vodacom answered some questions about its offer and future plans. In the past, such sessions would have been open to traditional media. This gives us insights about where brands are headed and, in my mind, the significance of collaborating with more than just traditional media outlets.

There are various tools to gather information about brands, and the people who influence the masses, through conversation in your product category. These include [BrandsEye](#), [SaidWot](#) and many others. Smart brands will find ways to get information about their products directly from customers and to collaborate with their loyal fans in order to improve reach and to reward them.

4. Brand-evangelist rewards

Most of the influencers we speak to realise that brands stand to benefit from their endorsement. As a result, they want to be rewarded for it. Some of the most-forward thinking and cutting-edge brands will use that and find ways to reward their brand evangelists.

In 2012, we began seeing more bloggers and people who have positioned themselves as trusted sources of information asking what brands will do for them if they test their latest products. One of the simplest ways for brands was to create collaborative communities wherein a handful of early adopters get early access to products - more than before - which was seen as a reward. There was also an increase in customer rewards programmes for Africa, where [Loyalty World](#) was hosted as a dedicated conference.

This year, more companies will get on that same bandwagon. Or they should at least make an attempt to.

5. Common-interest communities

The more brands understand the need to collaborate with their customers and/or related products or brands, the more I foresee a growth in common-interest communities. One of the companies that stood out and built a large community in 2012 was Nike. Its [Run Jozi](#) campaign attracted people who became part of a community that meets and runs regularly.

More communities will be established and brands will be looking for ways to plug into them in 2013.

6. Rise of the referral programme

2013 will see more brands jump onto the customer-referral programme. It generates qualified leads while rewarding people for participating, and the best ones enable brands to gather useful analytics.

7. Social engagement both online and offline

In 2012, Puma extended the reach of its social movement to South Africa with some [Puma Social](#) events in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

This year, more brands will be building both online and offline social movements, alongside plugging into common interest communities.

In conclusion, the overarching trends that seem to be on the rise are: collaboration between brands and the evangelists who rave about them, contextualising the usage of platforms for effective reach in Africa, and the rise of street teams that brands plug into.

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ABOUT MONGEZI MTATI

Mongezi Mati founded WordStart to help companies generate buzz around their products and services among South African influencers. He is passionate about helping brands to connect the dots from social media, digital data and human interactions outside the web. Mtati is also digital analyst, a speaker and a contributor on some of South Africa's leading platforms.

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