

The cheese has moved for brands and youth

 By [Banele Rewo](#)

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How do you entice or sell to a target market that is hesitant, if not sceptical, about commercial brands, although predisposed to being very loyal and capable of independently fulfilling its own needs?



Uniqueness of the SA youth market

Marketing and advertising industries are synonymous with identifying and creating. Sometimes they dictate but mostly they follow trends. To do this efficiently, their strategies have to be interwoven with the target market. As a marketer, a student, an influencer, a brand advocate and a consumer, I have witnessed very few innovative strategies being implemented or conceptualised in South Africa.

From a marketer's perspective, we miss the mark from the moment we fail to understand the uniqueness of the SA youth market. The cheese keeps moving while we are wielding text books and strategies from 1996, 2010 or even September 2011, which may be off the mark and off the streets by June 2012.

From a consumer's perspective, brands need to understand that my generation is not excited by non-engaging one-way media such as billboards and print. Television is for watching sketchy DVDs, complete seasons of a television series in one day or playing video games.

Engaging, sharing, influencing and being influenced

While we are doing these "activities", we are also engaging with friends globally, sharing international news events,

influencing and being influenced by peers and, most importantly, talking about your brands, if they are there with us.

And every other person within my peer circle either has a company, blog, day-lighting side projects or mostly all three at once, extending from marketing solutions, events, fashion, and music through to a contact in Guangzhou.

Marketers and brands need to form strong and solid, personal bonds with the young erratic yet loyal market. Marketers need to occupy the market's spaces, all the time, from online to the events they attend. As Alexandre Michelin stresses, "Be there all the times and across all platforms".

Influencer vs advocate

Explains Michael Brito *Smart Business, Social Business: A Playbook for Social Media in Your Organization*, "The term *influencer* is often used synonymously with *advocate*, but there is a difference between the two. Advocates provoke action because of the level of trust they have with their circles of influence. They are trusted because they are authentic, and people trust their friends when seeking product advice.

"Advocates also play a significant role in consumers' purchasing behavior and are willing to go the extra mile to answer questions about the brand or product."

Several brands pioneered strategies using influencers and advocates that occupied young people's spaces with varying degrees of success in 2011. Miller Genuine Draft, Nike Sportswear South Africa, Adidas Originals, Thesis Concept Stores, D.O.P.E. Stores, Strussbob, Nokia South Africa and Hansa Pilsner kept messages entrenched in their markets from within the market by developing and supporting the targets ambitions. The consumers did the marketing and converting for these brands as naturally as putting up a status update.

Room for improvement

However, there is room for improvement for the above-mentioned brands and those that might consider brand advocacy and influence marketing in 2012. I write the following from the perspective of a consumer and brand advocate.

1. Find seeders in the market

Finding topical seeders is not a daunting task but neither is it easy. A few active bloggers and commentators will open doors and links to other seeders and early adopters involved and vocal within their peers and communities, charities, social groups and political movements. We are a group that wields extensive social networks online and off. Also pay attention to the voices we follow and listen to.

2. Organise and group your sources

Building custom lists creates your own content feeds, providing marketers with new insights every day: content that can be trusted and easy to share because it is hand-picked from a network of trusted sources. These sources are excellent for advocating aspiration products and services because we are looked up to and are trusted by others.

3. Participate constructively

As content creators, we thrive on feedback and interaction. Whether you provide support or challenge our viewpoints, generating substantive conversation around our content encourages others to join in. Online interaction with these kinds of individuals creates a persona and a voice for the brand that cannot be created by the best marketing possible.

Added to that, it is better than those annoying questions, starchy quotes and high-school jokes most brands post on

Twitter currently.

4. Meet us

Events and regular hot spots of the season provide an opportunity to observe how we experience other brands and interact with one another in a natural environment. These could be trendy restaurants, gallery events or vendor markets.

These spaces provide a fertile ground for opportunities to meet your potential advocates personally. Personal relationships are more valuable than social media connections, and can lead to productive collaborations.

5. What you put in is what you get out

If you need something from your market, then naturally it will want something from you that will contribute to their ambitions. Even Tupperware has financial spin-offs for its cavalry of pavement-pounding "sales people".

Marketers make the mistake of failing to uniquely motivate and support these chosen advocates. If you give me a box full of your products with a task to share them with friends, take photos, tweet about it, like your Facebook page etc, then I am just similar to the guy at the intersection who hands out a flyer that promises to give you winning lottery numbers or enlarge your "product".

Ask me what I need to perform at a peak. Software for my blog, booking into a seminar, lunch with a potential mentor or assistance for a personal project are just basic starting points.

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