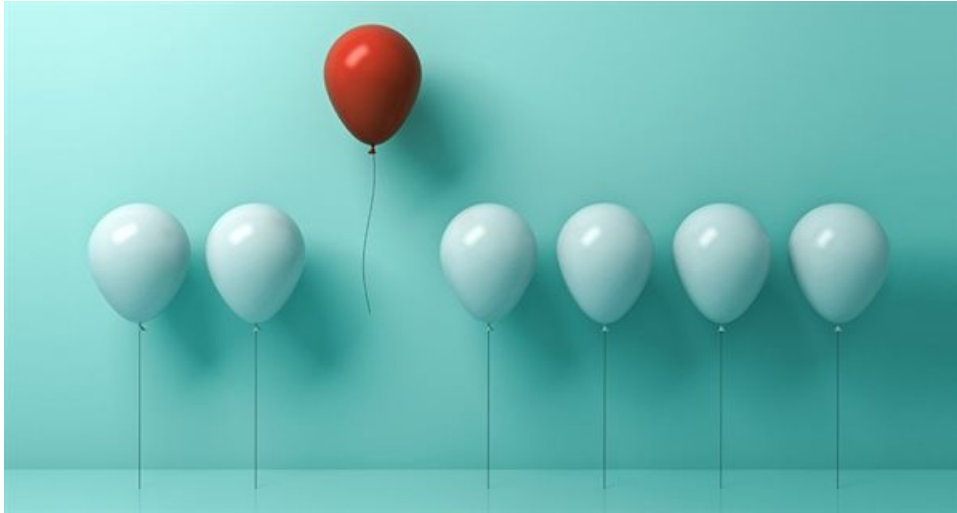


If the price is right

Issued by [Dentsu](#)

19 Nov 2019

Justine Drake, [John Brown](#) content director and editor of *Fresh Living* magazine, and social media strategist Sharon Kariwo discuss the role of content during the festive season when brands are all saying the same thing, as loudly as possible: spend your money here!



The festive period from Black Friday to Boxing Day is when big brands pull out all the stops to reach into consumers hearts and tug on their purse strings.

However, in a recent snapshot survey – *Consumer 2020 Vision: South Africans and their Outlook* – assessing current consumer sentiment, the biggest challenge identified (by 49% of respondents) was the expected increase in the cost of living.

Consumers are more concerned about inflation, the poor economy, the price of electricity, fuel and food, and interest rates (13% of respondents) than crime (1%).

The festive period will always be a time to splurge, but with the global economic downturn, customers will spend a lot more time investigating prices. How do you ensure that not only is your brand top of mind, but also that your product offering is justifiable when consumers are feeling the pinch?

Black Friday

According to Justine, ensuring your brand is seen and heard during this time is simply a case of 'he who shouts loudest'. This is the time to be big, brash and loud – clever, creative and useful content will be lost in the fray.

On Black Friday, while there is much anticipation and excitement, there is equal frustration. The queues may be too long, the staff may not be equipped to handle the chaos or the OLS can't handle the traffic. Take care to plan and train well or this frustration will turn to anger and resentment towards the brand.

Content vs. price

"At the end of the day, everyone will be offering the same product, and with the economy so depressed, the saying 'price is king' is truer than ever. On days like Black Friday, content won't matter; only price and service will give your brand a

competitive advantage," says Justine.

"However," Sharon explains, "prior to Black Friday there is an opportunity for storytelling." Because she doesn't know what the deals will be, she uses teaser campaigns and other content ideas to tell an aspirational lifestyle story, keep the brand top of mind and encourage search.

"We do things like polls on what you're hoping to buy on sale and, using the data obtained, we start to build the hype with tips on how to prepare for the big day, like putting things onto your wish list," she explains.

Sharon agrees with Justine that on the day, it's about the deals and nothing else. "I only communicate logistics on the day," she says. "For example, if there's a product that's selling particularly quickly, I'll mention how many are left at a specific store or online, or where the queues are shortest."

Updates on website performance and responses to customer complaints like "How can this be sold out in just an hour?" need to be immediate. After the event, brands will be inundated with customer service-related communication, queries and complaints about deliveries, call centres, etc. Be prepared.

And then there's Christmas

"Conversely, content, rather than price, remains at the heart of all things festive," says Justine, "but it only works when it's relevant. Very few South Africans go in search of northern hemisphere, cold-weather food, so why must brands continue to produce Eurocentric Christmas food spreads and scatter snowflake decals everywhere?"

"Instead, create content that is accessible (luxury items mixed with more affordable bits and bobs), solution-based (how to braai a gammon) and inspiring. Try DIY gifting ideas, recipe hacks... There are myriad opportunities for genuinely helpful content around Christmas and folk are desperate for it. If the customer can see themselves in your narrative, you will convert them to buy."

"It's really important to empower and inspire people with new ideas around their usual choices," says Justine. "If you're going to buy a gammon, give them ideas for another five things to do with it. Customers need a reason to spend more that will make sense and be justifiable."

Thinking like a shopper

When it comes to foot traffic, brands need to consider why a customer should choose their store over a competitor's. "To reduce the inevitable stress on big shopping days, stores can offer things like coffee and cupcakes, and validated parking to customers. Additionally, they can use digital marketing tools such as geolocation targeting around low-traffic stores to encourage customers to come and shop," says Sharon.

"I think we're moving towards a more frugal festive culture and consumers are gravitating towards bring-and-braai lunches and 'Secret Santa' draws," says Justine. But instead of seeing this as a drawback, create a reason to buy that one big-ticket Secret Santa gift rather than a list of meaningless little ones you would ordinarily buy for all and sundry.

"There is always a story to be told," says Justine, "and there is no better time of year to tell it."

The next big thing

Next year, we predict the shopping season may commence slightly earlier thanks to the world's largest retailer, Alibaba, which pioneered Singles' Day in China on 11 November 2009 as an anti-Valentines' Day gifting opportunity for those flying solo.

Singles' Day has been experiencing on average a 40% growth year-on-year and in 2017, Alibaba recorded \$25.3bn in

turnover on Singles' Day, which amounts to 276 times the Black Friday sales made in South Africa that year.

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