

Driving consumer engagement in Africa

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22 Oct 2014

The figures are well known and the sentiment even more so - Africa is enjoying significant growth of the middle class; GDP growth exceeds population growth, so access to disposable income is on the rise and this is expected to grow even further as we edge towards a working-age population of close to 1.3 billion people by 2050. We also have a significant skew to youth, with close to two-thirds of Africa's population being 25 and younger.



With this, the awareness and desire for branded goods is growing. Consumer goods companies all want a piece of the action, but the African consumer is both well-informed and extremely selective. Selecting the right brands and products to take to market and establishing the best way for their brands to engage with consumers will be critical to the long-term success of these consumer goods companies.

Our experience has shown us that there are four key considerations that brands and brand owners will need to take into account in the future if they are to successfully drive consumer engagement in Africa:

1. Keeping the promise

If a brand is a promise, brand owners need to ensure that they can deliver on that promise and provide their customers with a consistent experience. This relates as much to how customers experience the product as it relates to how customers experience the brand and the brand owners. Features and benefits are table-stakes. Customers expect brand owners to deliver the right product at the right price but, equally, customers expect the brand and the brand owner to behave in a familiar way - to do what they say and to say what they do. Consistently. Whether it is delivering a particular level of quality at a particular price-point or whether it is the language that you use (both visual and verbal), consistency builds familiarity, familiarity builds trust and trust builds brands.

2. A purposeful brand

However, in today's world, just keeping the promise is not enough. Customers today want to know that a brand and its owner serve a purpose higher than profit. Why are you doing what are you doing, and why does it matter? The Edelman goodpurpose® 2012 survey reports that consumers in emerging markets respond considerably more favourably to purposeful brands than do their counterparts in developed markets. That much better if it is a purpose that they, as consumers, can identify with.

In their 2013 white paper *Doing Business on Purpose: how meaning will transform your business* Yellowwood offered their advice on how to get purpose right. They identified four key actions to be taken in determining, articulating and activating your purpose as a business:

- **Assessment:** Understand the needs, aspirations, values of your customer and establish what kind of difference you want to make in relation to these needs.
- **Alignment:** Establish where these needs intersect with, or are solved by what you do best from a business perspective and what you hold dear as an organisation: your heritage, beliefs, strengths and behaviours as this will assure that you can identify a purpose statement that you can activate in an authentic and sustainable way.
- **Activation:** Execute your chosen purpose idea across the most important employee and customer touchpoints, partnerships, and communication platforms.

Engagement: Listen, respond, and facilitate real interaction, experiences and relationship-building activities with stakeholders around your purpose idea.

3. Relevance

As important as promise and purpose may be, so is the relevance of your message. To enable the creation of a message that truly connects with the right audience, and that elicits the desired response, it is critical to understand fully

- **Who your target market is**
- **How, where and when they use your product or service**
- **Where and when customers are most receptive to your message**

In an increasingly complex environment, it is essential to get close to consumers. To become immersed in their lives and to have the type of conversations with them that will enable you to understand what drives them.

Armed with the insights derived out of these ongoing consumer conversations, you will be well-positioned to deliver the most relevant content to your customer in the most relevant context. Using language, visual cues and platforms that resonate with them.

Depending upon the platform that you use, you can even customise the message or the experience for individual mind-sets and common interest communities. The mobile device, whether smartphone or feature phone, has become the personal computer of Africa. Ever-present, it provides brands and brand owners with a powerful platform to engage with customers directly. But, take care - the highly personal nature of the mobile device means that you can easily alienate customers if you impose yourself on their world. Using (permission-based) SMS or more complex platforms like mobile applications, brands and brand owners can serve up appropriate content that customers and potential customers are receptive to, and can to engage

with at a time and place that is most relevant to them.

Other platforms remain just as important. Whether as drivers of awareness or a call to action, the right message delivered at an appropriate time in a relevant traditional medium can elicit an equally valuable response.

4. Creativity

As consumer markets in Africa grow, so does the volume of messaging to those consumers. To the point that we begin to find ourselves consumed by marketing communication clutter. In such a world, the relevance of one's message alone will not be enough to break through.

Four years ago, the UK's Institute of Practitioners in Advertising conducted a study of advertising case studies from the preceding eight years that demonstrated, objectively, that creatively recognised advertising campaigns were 11 times more effective than those that were not creatively recognised. Albeit that the findings relate to the developed market, they are as relevant to Africa as they are to the developed market. Media channels in Africa are proliferating, and African audiences have the same level of choice as to how, where and when they consume information as do their developed market counterparts. In a world like this, a compelling story creatively told will give you the edge.

After all, Africa is a continent of storytellers. We revere good stories and storytellers. As audience, we engage with the story - we contribute and build - to something that is memorable and enduring. By tapping into this tradition of storytelling, and by leveraging on creativity to build their brand stories, brands and brand owners will be able to engage their audience and tell brand stories that gain and hold the attention of their audience. And, in so doing, shut out the clutter.

As is the case in the rest of the world, the balance of power has shifted in favour of the consumer. The more that brands and brand owners operating in Africa are able to understand consumers and engage with them around these four guiding principles, the more likely it is that those consumers will come to trust them and align with them. And, as trust and alignment becomes advocacy, so brands will be built, customers will be attracted and brand owners will be capable of achieving their desired long-term success.

View the [original article](http://www.howwemadeitinafrica.com) published on www.howwemadeitinafrica.com via EY's new [Africa 2030: Realizing the possibilities report](#).

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