

The digital trends that are shaping leading brands' marketing plans



By [Bianca Quinn-Diavastos](#)

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According to Google, more than 20 million South Africans are using the internet today. Thanks to cheaper smartphones and the rise of high-speed fibre connectivity, the Internet is a truly mainstream technology that reaches South Africans from every walk of life.

That means your brand now has the opportunity to connect with a wide digital audience that spans from the urban centres to the small towns and rural corners. Here are some of the most exciting opportunities and trends we see emerging in South Africa's digital marketing space.

1. Social media – there is no turning back

There's no doubt about it – social media is massive in South Africa. The question is how marketers can use channels such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and others as an integrated part of their marketing strategies? One of the major benefits of social media lies in its ability to use micro-targeting to deliver relevant content to customers. For example, you can target a 35-year-old in Alexandra who likes soccer for the launch of a new product using Facebook's targeting tools.



Harnessing social media effectively:

- Make it an integrated part of the marketing strategy rather than treating it as a silo.
- Social media isn't just about sales, but also about building a community with your customers.
- Different social channels have different strengths and audiences – so use them appropriately. For example, Instagram can be great for e-commerce calls to action and YouTube for post-sales loyalty efforts.
- Make sure each social ad and post has a strong and clear call to action.
- Test and optimise posts and ads by reviewing which content has been read, shared or reacted the most. You can glean valuable insights into what the community values most, which in turn can be used to refine and improve your content strategy.

2. Moving beyond ad blockers

Ad blockers – tools that allow consumers to avoid seeing ads on web pages – are changing how publishers design their sites as well as how marketers package their digital ads. This has given rise, in some instances, to focusing more on viewability (less advertising space with better viewable options) rather than quantity of ads.

That means you need to be thinking beyond traditional interruptive ad formats and towards forms of advertising not barred by ad blockers (for example, social media ads and native content). Furthermore, consider how you can create a relationship with customers that is based on an exchange of value. That means understanding the customer journey so you can still reach the customer even if an ad blocker is on.

Navigating the impact of ad blockers:

- Think about the wholesales cycle and customer journey rather than simply focusing on clicks and impressions.
- Use tagging to track what customers are doing on banners placed on publisher sites. This can provide insight into their behaviour, for example, which social channels they engage with regularly.
- Pull social media data into your analytics tools to understand if customers are sharing content, what influential people are saying about the brand, and more.
- Create measurable goals for each campaign and then benchmark success. Look at the learnings from previous campaigns.
- Be ready to learn and optimise.

3. Personalisation - connecting with individual consumer needs

Customers don't want to be bombarded with irrelevant or impersonal marketing messages – they want content and services to be tailored to their current needs. Most of us find it annoying, for example, when we keep seeing Facebook ads for a washing machine we bought months ago just because we once searched for washing machines on Google.

The effect is amplified by mobile devices – consumers expect brands to continually improve the personalisation of marketing messages and content. Location data and other contextual information from mobile devices mean that marketers have the ability to offer even more refined and relevant communication to customers.

Personalising marketing messages:

- Use multiple data sources to understand the needs of customers - data from advertising campaigns, market research and perhaps the customer relationship management (CRM) database.
- Integrate this data to get a single view of the customer across all channels. For example, blending CRM data with email marketing data and social media can help marketers understand where each customer is in their digital journey.
- Use this data to deliver a more meaningful message to each user. For example, Twitter and Facebook allow marketers to upload email contact lists to refine their targeting.

4. Marketing automation - bolstering more efficient customer journeys

Marketing automation tools help you improve communication with customers across the customer journey. They can help your brand to clean up its customer databases, eliminate human errors and inefficiencies, and streamline the whole process of communication.

For example, you can collect data such as customers' email and IP addresses, and then use it to see which products they are browsing on various e-commerce sites. Then, you can automatically trigger a remarketing email if the customer does not buy a product he or she placed in the shopping cart.

Optimising marketing automation:

- Invest in automation, so that your team can focus on segmentation, messaging, and other strategic issues rather than low-level tasks.
- Remember that setting up a marketing automation system will demand an upfront investment of time and effort. Think carefully about the rules for gathering data and triggering marketing events; the practicalities of gathering customer information; integrating marketing automation with existing direct marketing campaigns and programmes; and more.
- Start small and build on success. Marketing automation can be complex, so rather start out with a simple campaign to learn the ropes.
- As always, test and optimise. Use A/B testing (sending out two mails with different headers) and other techniques to learn what delivers the best results for the brand.

Closing words

Across all of these themes, the unifying thread is that the most successful marketers are moving towards viewing the customer journey as an integrated whole, and delivering better experiences at each and every touch point. This demands a close focus on gathering data, building a single view of the customer, and using automation and analytics to continuously improve return on investment as well as the client's lifetime journey with your brand.

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