

Facebook evens the playing field by discontinuing 'dark posts'

By [Dr Ewoudt Cloete](#), issued by [Wunderman Thompson](#)

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At the end of October, Facebook broke the news that it planned to introduce a new advertising feature that would lead to any paid posts run by brands becoming readily visible to anyone who visited the page. What this effectively means is the end of the concept known as 'dark posts', which allowed brands to choose not to publish specific pieces of content organically to their page, but instead, only promote them to a highly specific audience via paid budget amplification.



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Although the change comes as a direct response from Facebook to combat unfair paid political tactics on social media channels (read more about this here: <https://goo.gl/dQhRXB>), the change has a far-reaching impact for all brands that have made a home for themselves on the platform.

The most obvious impact is that brands that use the platform's paid features will be forced to make certain aspects of their paid media strategy and approach visible to not only the public, but competitors as well. More specifically, brands will no longer be able to keep their paid media targeting and content strategies on Facebook confidential, with anyone now being able to view and critically assess this information freely.

The change is therefore a double-edge sword for advertisers, as although they will be able to freely view their competitors' advertising strategies, their own strategies on the platform will be just as exposed.

This creates an interesting conundrum for brands: do they hold back on Facebook advertising spend and move spend over to other platforms where advertising information is not as public? Considering the potential reach and comparatively low cost of advertising on Facebook, this is not a strategy that can be easily recommended.

Instead of moving completely away from Facebook advertising, there is merit in considering using Facebook mainly for ad campaigns that target the organisation's broader or more obvious audience groups. Advertisers can then use other social media platforms such as LinkedIn to administer more niche and tactical advertising campaigns that could potentially lead to the divulging of key strategic advantages if their approach would become known to competitors. Using this approach,

brands can continue to utilise the impressive advertising options and competitive pricing of Facebook without it leading to giving their competitors insight into key and differentiating advertising strategies.

The strategy however only remains feasible as long as other social media platforms do not follow suit, and considering that Twitter is planning a similar feature to that of Facebook, it might not be long before brands that rely on social paid advertising to push digital KPIs have no choice but to reveal all of their advertising strategies to whomever would like to see them.

The availability of more advertising data on Facebook also presents an opportunity for third-party analytics software, such as Unmetric, Sprout Social and Fanpage Karma, to provide more detailed predictive insights into competitors' social media strategies. Although this data will now be available manually, there is an opportunity here to collate and group the data in a way that could lead to further market and competitor insights.

No matter how brands choose to react and adapt to these recent changes by Facebook, one thing is certain: it presents brands with a valuable opportunity that if utilised correctly, can help create competitive advantages not previously possible.

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Cloete is Head of Social media at Wunderman SSA.

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