

Social media - the power and the pain

By [Nicole Capper](#)

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A recent fundraising campaign undertaken for Autism Western Cape, dubbed Jail4Bail, involved executive director Gerhard Pieterse jailing himself in custom-made jail cells in Bayside Mall and Canal Walk, Cape Town, with the intention of reaching a total "bail/donation" figure of R1 million. What was essentially an offline campaign lead to a social media explosion, with some interesting results and lessons.



The background

Our Cape Town based agency Mango-OMC was commissioned to negotiate sponsorships, provide a communications and marketing plan, and implement these accordingly.

The budget was limited.

Due to the budgetary constraints and based on experience of both on- and offline campaigns, a decision was made to undertake limited online activity - due to the time involved in ensuring consistent monitoring and response - and to target offline channels as the primary communication platform. This was underpinned by on-street promotions, joint marketing alliances and strategic conventional marketing collateral.

During the course of the campaign, an opportunity was presented to include a competition element - that of winning a Vuka Scooter. This lent itself to a Facebook invitation to enter via SMS or the Autism Western Cape website. An offshoot of this was a passionate response from individuals in the South African online community.

What happened?

A Vuka "badge" was designed and posted online, inviting viewers to send an SMS to the competition line. As a result, an onslaught of online postings went up and Pieterse began to engage with the online community via Facebook, Twitter and Skype.

Picked up by Muti.co.za (a prominent South African-based news social bookmarking site), the Jail4Bail Vuka Scooter competition badge was prominently placed on its site (a first for Muti), African blog aggregator Afrigator built a Jail4Bail aggregation page, Facebook group members replaced their photographs with the Vuka badge, and bloggers posted a barrage of articles.

All of which culminated in the question being posed by various online communities and individuals: "Social media - is it spam?"

So what was the conclusion?

Interesting debates ensued, with no definitive conclusion being drawn; however, valuable insights were raised.

As we tracked the online posts, tweets, Facebook comments and blogs, we decided to investigate the phenomenon further by asking the questions below:

1. Efficacy of the extensive online coverage in terms of provoking a call to action and how did this compare with offline?
2. How extensively did the online communication highlight the key concepts underpinning the campaign?
3. Were the online communities also aware of the offline promotions and coverage that had taken place and if so, did the messaging differ?

These were the results:

Call to action

In the Jail4Bail campaign, radio, community and regional newspapers were forerunners in terms of garnering donations.

Donations significantly spiked with every radio mention. In addition to Cape Talk, Kfm and Radio 702, which were avid supporters, just about every radio station in the country featured the initiative. Interested members of the public travelled far and wide to visit Pieterse in his jail cell after hearing the public service announcements aired on Cape Talk and Kfm and tuning into their favourite stations and hearing interviews.

The same results were obtained from the *Tabletalk*, *Tygerburger* and *Cape Times* newspaper features.

Discussion, debate and brand exposure, resulting in extensive brand awareness, were prominent on the online platforms. Engaging conversations sparked around the campaign, but the call to action (which was to donate money) was less than anticipated.

Donations reached almost R650 000 via conventional offline PR, marketing and promotional campaigns and a total of R2123 via social media platforms. This figure was tracked by means of the Vuka competition entries.

Awareness

Comments enquiring why there had been no offline coverage were tracked - indicating that many of the individuals commenting on the campaign had no background insight into what the initiative had entailed in the many months prior to the online coverage.

There was, however, a high level of interest in autism and why a campaign of such a sensational nature had been necessary.

The debates also sparked some controversial comments that were not responded to by the individuals posting the mentions, resulting in Mango-OMC spending many a pro-bono hour monitoring and responding where appropriate.

The experience affirmed what we had known for a few months:

1. An online campaign should always be integrated with the offline communication strategy to ensure a cohesive and well-positioned call to action.
2. It is essential that there is an integrated media expert and not a channel expert posting communication to ensure that the essential points for any campaign are highlighted effectively and dialogue responded to timeously. With the best of intentions, postings driven by individuals outside of the campaign team can prove negative if comments are not managed.

It is becoming increasingly obvious to the PR community that integrated campaigns are no longer a luxury.

The case study above highlights the fact that if online communities become passionate about a campaign - whether you've intended for it to happen or not - integration of messaging and tracking communication is essential. Budgeting for those hours is vital.

With this knowledge intact, we approached the next such campaign with the knowledge that the budget needs to be accommodated by client and that client education in terms of the importance of an integrated campaign is vital.

Our next article will talk about integration of online and offline campaigns, along with practical examples that provide further insight into the power of convergence.

For more:

- [Social media to rescue Jail4Bail campaign?](#) [article]
- Stii.co.za: [The big Social Media failure?](#) [blog]

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicole Capper is joint partner at Mango-OMC (www.mango-omc.com), a Cape Town-based boutique PR and communications consultancy that encompasses web, mobile and conventional offline PR. With a background in brand management and 10 years' experience in the field of marketing and PR, Nicole made the leap to self-employment five years ago. She has an innate understanding of the media landscape and an ability to build and sustain long-term working relationships, and her interest in delving into the constantly evolving communication platforms has become her trademark. Contact her on tel +27 (0)21 461 9244 or email [nicole@mango-omc.com].

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