

How do brands get noticed amidst the online clutter?

 By [Tracy Jones](#)

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No prediction piece would be complete without first acknowledging that Covid-19 has changed our world forever. Remote working across industries and an exponential uptake of e-commerce and digital marketing has changed the face of brands - from personal care to gadgets to pet stores - forever.



Tracy Jones, managing director at Positive Dialogue

Luckily, most agencies have been adopting a fully integrated communications strategy for quite some time, and so from a capability standpoint, we were well-placed to communicate in the new normal. However, the big challenge is standing out in a cluttered space where everyone is vying for the consumer's attention. The need to stand out will drive the progressive trends in the communications space in 2021 and beyond.

Connection

The global pandemic and related lockdowns reinforced our need for authentic human connection. However, in a world where many people are working remotely and choose - or are forced by governments - to stay at home, the entry point to their lives is through their devices.

In the incessant and rapid thumb-swiping digital world, brands have mere seconds to make authentic connections with consumers. The job of a communications agency in the new normal will be to bring brands into online communities, where meaningful conversations are already happening - in a way that adds value to the lives of these digital consumers.

How will agencies do this?

Content

With highly specialised teams of content creators, agencies will be able to open the doors to these online communities for brands. The old model of influencers that are paid to endorse no longer ticks the authenticity box in many instances, as digital natives become more savvy.

Progressive communications agencies will work alongside teams of highly skilled content creators who are embedded in the cultures the brands wish to engage with. This is not a prescriptive model, but a collaborative model, where the content then becomes valuable assets for brands to use across their channels.

But how will brands create authentic content?



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Values

Research is piling as high as the ceiling pointing to the fact that both millennials and Gen Zs are attracted to brands that stand for something. We already know millennials are more attracted to working for companies that have a greater purpose, and research goes as far as to suggest Gen Z consumers will research brands to make sure they live the promises they make.

So, in a world where the majority of the buying power is increasingly shifting into the hands of young people, progressive agencies need to know how and when to communicate authentic brand values. Anything contrived will do immeasurable harm to a brand, which again speaks to the need to work with highly specialised and relevant content creator teams.

In the super connected world, where a narrative can spread like wildfire, it is imperative that agencies have competent risk and crisis communication teams.

Crisis

South Africans are no stranger to brands that have been at the centre of huge PR disasters, some of which have led to nationwide protests. While it is impossible to predict every possible risk scenario, brands in the new normal will need to engage communications agencies that build comprehensive crisis communication frameworks driven by research, experience and data.

Data

Like the past few years, 2021 will see agencies rely very strongly on data. For a few years already, strategic decisions have been made based on analysis of consumers and their behaviour. In the new normal, data and competent teams able

to quickly analyse this data, will enable even faster, agile communication decisions.

Connected consumers are literally telling us in real time what they think of our efforts and this provides a golden opportunity to engage with them meaningfully. Progressive agencies will not exploit or take advantage of data and betray consumers' trust.

Technology

Barely a month goes by without another, new development hitting the headlines and fuelling excitement. Social listening changed the game a few years back - who's to know for certain how augmented reality and artificial intelligence will alter our efforts and enhance our efficacy?

Experience has shown that technology is an exceptionally powerful tool to support and augment a communications strategy, but the root, the core, should always be authentic human connection. Technology for technology's sake is just a gimmick. When the awe subsides, there's an empty shell. However, if technology is the vehicle to deliver authentic, meaningful connections - the results can be astounding.

In conclusion, as our world hurtles into the fourth industrial revolution at breakneck speed while trying to overcome the global pandemic, reverting to authentic, human values and connection - powered by the latest data-driven and tech-enabled solutions - provides a compelling edge to allow brands to stand out among the clutter. This is how they get the click, and not the swipe.

ABOUT TRACY JONES

Tracy Jones is the founder and MD of Positive Dialogue, the full-service Public Relations and Influencer Marketing Agency in the DUKE Group of companies.

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