

Why savvy instant messaging campaigns can drive global brand awareness

 By [Marco Broccardo](#)

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With the number of instant messaging app users worldwide [expected](#) to top 2.4 billion by 2021, there is no better time for brands to embrace using these platforms as a way to engage with customers. However, care must be taken in its adoption as the rules are still being made up as we go along...



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Platforms like Telegram, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp are entrenched in the hearts and minds of consumers. Because they are freely available, they provide a very effective entry point for a brand to have a presence in not only the local market but also the rest of the continent. Indeed, with just one point of entry, brands can build a strong presence in multiple markets.

Of course, using messaging engines for customer engagement is hardly a new thing. We know the ‘SMS to win’ or variations thereof all too well. But given the enhanced features that instant messaging provides, brands can do so much more than just sending a text message and hoping for the best.

Overcoming obstacles

Before brands can explore more innovative ways to interact with customers using instant messaging, they need to consider how best to navigate two potential obstacles.

Firstly, because these platforms are free to use, care must be taken that any customer activities be designed in such a way that it cannot be seen to be spam. We all know this from personal experience. There is nothing more frustrating than getting inundated with brand messages on your instant messaging client. It is therefore vital that organisations think differently about how to use instant messaging for customer service, direct sales, and even content marketing. Yes, the potential for interaction is clear, but it needs to be managed carefully.

Secondly, given the evolving regulatory landscape around how personal customer data is used, brands need to be careful about how they interact with customers on instant messaging platforms. Not only should the likes of the Protection of Personal Information (PoPI) Act in South Africa and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union be kept top of mind, but there also needs to be an understanding of the rules of engagement on each platform.

For example, WhatsApp has publicly stated that it does not want its platform to be used for promotions, and platforms like Facebook have developed a series of rules of engagement for promotions, which continue to evolve. USSD remains an entry platform that does not really have any rules and has delivered unprecedented interactions. Unfortunately, and perhaps unfairly, many advertisers feel it is only suited to the lower LSM market segments.

Looking ahead

Perhaps the best way to see instant messaging is that it is an intimate platform. Unlike email or other digital communication tools, it should be viewed as a one-on-one environment. Brands should not generalise but really focus on the wants and needs of that individual customer. This is where effective data analysis and management comes in. If a company does not understand what a customer wants, then instant messaging may not be the best solution.

However, because the rules are (almost) being made up as we go along, brands should experiment and have fun. Consumers are looking for a more personal experience and instant messaging really does allow for that.

Instant messaging is a part of almost every mobile user's connected lifestyle. Now is the time to take it seriously as a brand-building solution and differentiate the business from competitors.

ABOUT MARCO BROCCARDO

CEO at Colony HQ

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