



*Anthony Berklich at Le Selmon Hotel Morocco
Pic by Morlaye Kamara, courtesy of
www.inspirecitizen.com*

Online target *the African youth*

As Africa's youth rise in power, companies have a golden opportunity to speak to them online

With over 200 million people aged between 15 and 24, Africa has the youngest population in the world. This is according to the United Nations, whose African Economic Outlook report indicates that this figure will double by the year 2045.

"Africa is a young continent," says Jacques Du Bruyn, Managing Director of Flume Digital Marketing (www.flume.co.za). "I'd like to think that we're starting to get to know who they are but we don't quite know what their consumption and communication patterns are online."

Fortunately, people are communicating online. A lot. According to Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman of Google's parent company, Alphabet, five million terabytes of information were created from the dawn of civilisation to 2003. That much information is now being created every two days.

"If that information is being created every two days, it exists online," Du Bruyn says.

"That means we've got information about where people go on the Internet, what they're saying, who they're speaking to, what devices they're using, where they're using those devices, what type of technology they're using to speak to business, and what businesses are using to speak to consumers."

All this information can be turned into knowledge that drives concrete action and positive results. This happens when businesses speak to the right people at the right time with the right message in the right place.

"The African youth are speaking online right now," Du Bruyn says. "They are a part of the five million terabytes of data being created. And we can start looking at things like our traditional buying funnel."

The process typically begins with awareness (via the placement of advertisements); moves on to consideration (hoping that the right people will see the ads); proceeds to remarketing (tagging people who click on adverts and following them across the Internet to market to

them again); and ends with a group of those who one hopes are interested in whatever was offered to them.

“That, in today’s day and age, doesn’t cut it,” Du Bruyn says. “We need to look at a new sales funnels based on data.”

Using the right data and the right tools

With the use of digital targeting optimisation and media buying platforms, companies can use online data to speak to the right people from the start instead of throwing advertising at a wall and seeing what sticks. Similarly, businesses can offer different experiences based on what

people want via landing pages they prefer in the consideration phase.

“If we know that Person A likes to view information on their mobile phone, we can drive them to a mobile page,” Du Bruyn says. “And if we know that Person B likes to consume information on their desktop, we can drive them to a desktop page. If we know that Person C is an older person who likes to go about the user journey with more information, we can include more information. And if we know that Person D doesn’t like to read too much, we can give pictures. That’s where we start optimising based on who we’re speaking to.”

After the remarketing phase, companies should have data segments based on the people they’ve spoken to online. These ‘buckets’ will be much more well-defined because the process of online marketing—using the right data and the right tools—was done in the right way to begin with.

“With the use of online tools, they’re probably interacting with you all the way down that funnel,” Du Bruyn says. “From the awareness phase, it could be a blog post, a public relations article, or a newsletter you sent out. From the consideration phase, they’re engaging with you on social media platforms or even clicking on a button in the newsletter. We need to know what they’re doing that.”

Being able to track people through all these interactions makes it easier to sequence content. For example, a travel brand might start with broad marketing material that just talks about the destination. The next piece of content could talk about the activities the destination offers. Only after this, would the discussion go into price, discounts, and so on. But whatever the order might be, it has to be on a platform that works on the user’s phone.

“If you’re thinking about African youth, it has to be mobile,” Du Bruyn says. “Don’t even think about desktop. If they’re using feature phones, how are you using USSD bots to interact with them? If they’ve got smartphones, how are you using apps to speak to them? It sounds obvious but when you get into the nitty gritty, it’s difficult to think about how to use the right platform to speak to them. But it has to be mobile.”

Creating special moments

Does this mean traditional websites are obsolete? No, according to Anthony Berklich, creator of Inspired Citizen Media (www.inspiredcitizen.com), a luxury travel platform and blog based in New York. While people might go to social media accounts more often, having a beautiful website is still an easy and affordable way to make your presence known.

“It’s important to have a good website because if someone’s going to Google you, it’s the first impression that comes up,” he says. “If they stay on your home page for ten seconds, they can get a clear picture of what you’re about. I can’t tell you how many amazing destinations I’ve been to that have mediocre websites. Many countries have such beauty that is essential to capture. So don’t skimp on photos.”



Jacques Du Bruyn, Managing Director of Flume Digital Marketing

Indeed, quality photography (with short, memorable, and interesting captions) is critical for online marketing. This applies especially to social media, where incredible imagery wins. Of course, it's important to get the balance right. Companies shouldn't post a hundred images in a day unless they want people to unfollow them. But they also shouldn't let their accounts be stagnant for two weeks otherwise followers will lose interest too. Instead, by making a conscious effort to create special moments that focus on the details, they can evoke big emotions through small things.

"Upload at least once a day," Berklich says. "Just make sure it's quality and make sure it's beautiful. Don't put up anything ugly because that's the biggest turnoff. I've seen amazing hotels that have the ugliest Instagram accounts: a beautiful high tea service that's shot in ugly lighting that makes the scone look like it's 100-years-old and could stop a door—it's not attractive. So you need to be cognisant of the beauty you're showing. If it's not pretty, don't put it up."

Making your social media presence known

Also tricky is getting the messaging right. For example, the images or video one uses to market to a South African audience might spark or offend them in a way that isn't the case with a different group elsewhere. This is the reality we need to be aware of if we want to live well in a shared world.

"Know who you're speaking to, where you're placing videos, and where you're placing imagery," Berklich says. "If you want to be broader, show something that appeals to everybody. And if there are certain issues, don't put an image up that's going to offend. It's not about ignoring it or addressing it but letting everyone know that it's a global community."

This is why it's helpful to know and connect with online influencers that the target audience follows and respects. It will give companies an opportunity to observe how best to express themselves and offer ideas on how they can integrate new ways to stand out. More than that, partnering with like-minded individuals and organisations can help businesses conceptualise ideas together. The key is to team up with the right people in the first place.

"Being creative and making the right partnerships is important," Berklich says. "It shows that you're active and engaged, which is essential.

Seven African youth trends

"For the younger African market, we need to think simply," says Du Bruyn. "We need to think about what they're using in their hands, what their communication patterns are, where they get their information and what sort of apps they are using. Once we've looked at that, we can start to understand a bit more about them."

Social'cise: The aim is no longer solely to tone up and keep fit. Exercise has become fun.

Swagger: Many youths would give their left arm for the latest tech device that adds to their image.

Photographs: The fascination with photography seems insatiable, with 350 million pictures being uploaded to Facebook daily.

Shopaholics: Although shopping is increasingly perceived as a hobby rather than a necessity, fashion and dress are becoming a high-intensity artform for the youth.

My music, our music: Local music (and the respect for local artists) is on the rise.

Real-time marketing: The youth expect 24/7 contact and real-time responses to online queries.

E-motional: We'll see a growth of Internet dating in this market as more inventive online dating sites are used more frequently.

But some PR agencies are a little short-sighted. They just look at numbers and conversions. They don't necessarily look at the stories people are telling through their accounts on social media or through their blogs. And it's important to get a handle on everything—the whole story that's being told by these influencers—so that you can connect with appropriate people who are excited about sharing whatever you have to offer."

No matter whom they are marketing to or what industry they're in, it's also important for a company to make its social media presence known. Any and all touchpoints are an opportunity for potential customers to find and connect with the brand. That's why creating unique handles and hashtags allows people to regularly engage at all stages before, during, and after the buyer journey.

"That's the beauty of social media," Berklich says. "Everyone around the world can see what you're doing. I can see the lion you saw at Kruger National Park that morning while I'm having coffee in my living room in New York City. It's about creating that global conversation and making everybody feel part of a general narrative."

One of the biggest differences we see today

Being part of a global conversation makes it critical that companies can speak their audience's language. Instead of assuming they're hip enough to communicate with the youth (note: don't use the word 'hip'), they should

spend time learning their terminology. It's also important to spend time engaged in the fashion, music and other key aspects of the youth lifestyle to better understand what drives them.

"Don't make assumptions, which are the biggest mistakes a marketer can make," Du Bruyn says.

"Often in marketing, we put a piece of creative together, we take it past a few of the tests, we put it out there, and we wonder why it doesn't work. We can't always hit the nail on the head the first time but be willing to be wrong about your assumptions. Be willing to make mistakes and learn from them about how to speak to the target audience."

Most important, business shouldn't assume that all Africans (or all young people) are the same. For example, many African youths haven't had the privileges their peers around the world have had. Indeed, many might have been forced to raise their siblings or take care of their families from a young age. This ensures that their values are different.

"African youth are rising up to be proud Africans and we need to speak to that," Du Bruyn says. "It comes down to the way that they were brought up and what they aspire to as opposed to what sort of technology they use. Your content needs to speak to aspirations. You need to mirror the kind of Africans that they hope to be." ▲

Eugene Yiga