

The seven Rs of marketing to the youth in South Africa

By  Mike dos Santos

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Not only are young South Africans becoming more aware of current and important news stories and issues facing their world, but there is also a heightened sense of awareness of those less fortunate than themselves.



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Aligned to the trend of "truth hunting", the youth are seeking out and supporting "brands of substance" as symbols of their growing social awareness. As such, we need to bear in mind the following new rules of engagement - the "seven R's" detailed below.

With regards to marketing to the youth in South Africa, we are also witnessing their growing appreciation of corporate social investment programmes, with research indicating increased support of brands perceived by these consumers as "doing good". A great example of this is KFC with its ongoing "Add Hope" initiative, which continues to enjoy high recognition and appeal amongst younger consumers.

Another example is Nike (winner of the "overall coolest brand" in the Sunday Times "Generation Next" Survey), which has long played an active role in addressing relevant social causes and investing in the youth worldwide through its involvement in the "sport for change" movement and youth development through sport.

The "seven Rs":

Taking all these factors into account, the following new rules of engagement now apply.

- **Relevance:** Fulfil an authentic role in their lives, striving to be socially useful and relevant to their needs. For instance, ask: "How can we facilitate consumers' strong need to share with (and contribute to) the world around them?"
- **Rapport:** Capture their imagination by demonstrating a deep understanding of their needs; in particular, drive emotional and experiential appeal, rather than functional selling points alone, to help foster a more meaningful brand connection.
- **Reason:** Use social media wisely - for instance presence (on its own) is never a good enough reason to play in the social media space. Again, usefulness is key!

- **Recognition:** Leverage their "can-do" attitude, acknowledging and empowering their desire for achievement (both academic and non-academic in nature).
- **Respect:** Never patronise them just because they are young - in particular, never talk down to them as "kids" or fall back on stereotypes when communicating with them. At the same time, however, aim to celebrate their youthful spirit. (We need to remember that for the youth, there is a fine line between these two aspects!)
- **Relationship:** For youth-focused brands, discourse trumps monologue. And democracy trumps authoritarianism. Never preach to consumers and remember, wherever possible, to cede some control when engaging them as "prosumers".
- **Realness:** Strive for entertainment value and true engagement, rather than relying on advertising *per se* - as today's youth are becoming adept at seeing through (and tuning out) overt and forced corporate messages.

Jason Levin (Managing Director of HDI Youth Marketeers) sums it up succinctly:

"Marketing to youth is more about marketing with them - it's a dialogue, it's about being brave enough to try and embed your brand into their lives and letting them use (and sometimes abuse) it as they see fit. They don't see brands as owned by corporates, they see them as owned by consumers. There are ways to win with this market, but classical marketing approaches are unlikely to do it."

ABOUT MIKE DOS SANTOS

Michael graduated with B.A. Honours in Marketing Communication (cum laude) and started his career as a marketing and research assistant before moving into Strategic Planning at Grey Johannesburg. With a keen attention to detail and experience across the marketing communication spectrum, Michael continues to be inspired by the dynamic world of brands and branding. Mike now works as a Strategic Director at Shift Joe Public.

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