

Aligning with the elders: Influencer marketing

 By [Murray Legg](#)

25 Jan 2016

When YouTube started out of beta phase a mere 11 years ago and made its first video available for public viewing, there were 7 billion possible sets of eyeballs available to watch one video.

2016 will see the a billion monthly active YouTube users, who are mostly aged 17 to 30, load 300 hours of content every minute of the day.

A far cry from 2005's 'Day at the Zoo':

Eyeballs and re-engagement

The challenge has moved from developing emotionally engaging and remarkable content, to an extreme competition for access to eyeballs, and then re-engaging that audience periodically to urge them to act on a call to action.

The concept of an elder of a community being a source of knowledge is starting to turn full cycle. In a digital community, persons of authority and respected for their opinions, are leading the conversation online, and bringing brands along with them. Influencer marketing is proving to be a highly effective means of transmission of a brand's message to an audience.

Sugar-coated re-sharing

The first lesson that brands learnt on social media is that trying to grow and sustain an audience for the single benefit of re-sharing sugar-coated messaging with them has yielded very little return, at significant cost. They're now learning that traditional unidirectional messaging to an online audience is risky - the internet holds a brand accountable to its promises and are quick to call them out when they fail to deliver.

Social influencers hold the key to steering conversation, endorsing the good and flaming the bad. "Engagement" metrics that brands hold so dear are as much a vanity metric as page views - just because someone "Liked" your page doesn't mean that they'll buy your product. Brands aren't just competing with direct competitors, they're competing with every available product that's appealing to that particular audience segment, so justifying why it should win that share of wallet is

becoming increasingly difficult.

Move from vanity metrics to trust



Infographic

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We expect to see the leading brands taking on a growing their market share by reaching new audiences through influencer marketing, and then sustaining their engagement by periodically re-engaging with that audience to remind their potential customers of their availability, not necessarily expecting a kick in sales overnight. Trust is earned over time, and those willing to earn it need to be consistent.

"We might be shepherds, stewards, and guardians of our brands, but we no longer control them," says Wendy Clark, senior executive of Coca-Cola.

Investing in influencer advocates will be a theme we see happening in 2016. Appreciating that the leverage effect of an influencer allows them to sustain a large interested audience, and that there is an overlap of brand audience within that, creates a basis for brands to enter the conversation online, and even be endorsed or recommended. Including that digital personality in the brand messaging from the outset and giving them the freedom to craft the messaging that their audience resonates with is crucial to audience appreciation of it.

As audiences evolve and find their niche interests and digital communities, brands need to embrace the conversation, earn their seat at the table to share their wares, take comment onboard and evolve with the needs of that community. Aligning with the elders, in this case the social influencers, has never made more sense.

For more on how influencer marketing is set to expand in Africa in particular, [click here](#).

Don't miss the Webfluential [infographic on audiences in Africa](#).

ABOUT MURRAY LEGG

Murray Legg is the Head of Global Strategy at the Influencer platform, Webfluential. Murray holds a Ph.D in biomedical engineering, was included in the global list of Power30under30 in 2013 and *Mail & Guardian's* Top 200 Young South Africans in 2014. Murray leads strategic business thinking at Webfluential, focusing on its services and growth trajectory. He is a commercial and entrepreneurial thinker with an ability to execute projects.

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