

# Is WhatsApp the new email for SMEs?

Globally, 65% of millennials and their younger counterparts, Generation Z, prefer to message rather than call or email, and locally, WhatsApp is the leading communication app. As these generations now make up the majority of the workforce, and consequently a large amount of the customers and suppliers of local small and medium enterprises (SMEs), it is vital for business owners to consider changing their communication tactics to not only foster relationships with them but to also bolster cash flow.



Lauren Du Plooy

This is according to Lauren Du Plooy, director at Rae & Associates and an Intuit Trainer/ Writer Network member, who says that messaging apps are changing the communication landscape for businesses. “As these digitally-reliant generations grow, so does the need for fast-paced, immediate communication between businesses, suppliers and consumers alike.”

“The younger generation is also set on having more personal relationships with those that they do business with, and therefore communicating with them in a more personal way, via their preferred communication channels, can assist with this,” adds Du Plooy.

## **Scope for a more personal relationship with the client**

“For example, as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger are primarily used to communicate with friends and family, a company that successfully communicates via these platforms is more likely to form a better, more personal and intimate

relationship with their client or supplier.”

This is a great way to garner brand loyalty, she explains. To illustrate this sentiment, a survey from Facebook IQ and Nielsen found that 53% of customers are more likely to buy from a company that provides customer service via chat on WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger.

Bearing this in mind, it is important to consider that these communication methods could also have a direct impact on reducing the amount of time in which small businesses gets paid, adds Jolawn Victor, head of emerging markets at Intuit Quickbooks.

“It has been reported that late payments are the number one problem hampering the growth of SMEs in South Africa as well as globally. It is for this reason that QuickBooks developed its WhatsApp feature, which allows for business owners to share invoices via WhatsApp.”

“It is very easy for emails to go unnoticed, due to the large amount one receives on a daily basis combined with the vast number of newsletters that companies share via email marketing,” explains Victor. “This is why messaging apps can be a great solution for urgent matters such as payments and invoices, that don’t need a long word count or detailed response.”

### **Pros and cons of different communication methods**

Du Plooy says that when considering new methods of communication, business owners need to note, however, that different forms of communication have pros and cons, and they need to discern how best to communicate with different clients, customers and suppliers.

“For example, email is better for more detailed communication, and phone calls provide a certain amount of efficiency, while messaging apps are the most efficient for communication that is urgent, needs to be personal or to be responded to in a timeous manner,” she explains.

“As the business landscape is continuously changing due to the adoption of the fourth industrial revolution by digital generations, small businesses need to ensure that they stay ahead of the communication curve so as not to be left behind,” concludes Du Plooy.

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