

The new word of mouth

By [Candy Dempers](#), issued by [MediaHeads 360](#)

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Brands looking to extend their reach need look no further than the palms of their hands.



Every piece of marketing advice in the new media space will make mention of digital and the power of the influencer. But do all influencers influence equally and what is the right influence?

A quick web search shows the top 1000 Instagram influencers in South Africa. The metric is derived from the number of followers the person has on the platform. Scrolling through the list it becomes clear that followers alone aren't the way to make a considered decision.

Numbers are not everything

If numbers alone were the golden key to unlocking positive sentiment towards a brand, then all those marketers would be doing is booking campaigns with Cristiano Ronaldo, Kylie Jenner, and Selena Gomez. In this scenario, the next logical step after the campaign booking is that the sales doors would open, customers would stream in, and they would buy products because their favourite celeb was pictured holding one. This strategy works from time to time, and can deliver results, but is it always appropriate, effective, or necessary? In the world of influence, numbers are important, but what remains more important is the fabric of the community and followers, not just the number of followers. When one understands the community or tribe that the influencer has created and serves, the task of matching a brand to that is seamless.

Considered opinion

In the democratised and unfiltered world of the internet, anyone is free to deliver their opinion, but that doesn't necessarily make it a considered opinion. It is crucial that brands align themselves with influencers who have the right tone, approach, message and resonate with their identified community. By being authentic, relevant and building the right audience over time, communities will want to hear what an influencer has to say.

Influencers stars are on the rise. Farieda "Pharoahfi" Metsileng, who is an influencer and actress, recently bagged the lead in the South African adaptation of the American series "Ugly Betty". She credits her success to the fact that she was able to showcase her talents on her social media pages. That led to her being headhunted by MTV to present on their platform, and now she is "Bettina Sikhakhane" on uBettina Wethu, airing on SABC 1. Advertisers who can leverage relationships with influencers like Pharoahfi (@pharoahfi) will benefit from the amplification of the influencers brand across channels like TV and Radio.

Engagement rate

Saying the right things to the right audience at the right time builds engagement. If you're selling soccer boots, Cristiano Ronaldo may be your man while Kylie could work for face beat products. Puma have recently started working with Selena Gomez as she speaks a language they like. If, however you're selling Tupperware neither the footballer, the socialite, or the pop princess will boost sales of your new clipable lids!

Engagement rates are generally calculated by dividing the number of likes and comments by the total number of followers and multiplying this by 100 to get a percentage.

Local beauty blogger, Mihlali Ndamase (@mihlali_n) has 1,7 million followers on Instagram while self-proclaimed public-figure, Nadia Jaftha (@nadiajaftha) has 550,000 thousand followers. Together they have fewer followers than musician Cassper Nyovest. Nyovest boasts 5.1 million followers on his account. What Jaftha and Ndamase lack in number they make up in likes. Speaking in a targeted fashion to their followers, Ndamase has an engagement rate of 2.90% and Jaftha boasts a 3.7% engagement rate. Nyovest has an engagement rate of 0,90%. Instagram isn't forthcoming when it comes to sharing what they believe a "good" rate is, but it is generally accepted by marketing experts that an engagement rate of 1% to 5% is good.

Authentic voices

Research has shown that everyday people trust influencer opinions as much as they would those of their friends and family. Authenticity is a word that comes up often when chatting to influencers, due to the fact that their followers and community will call them out as soon as they are seen to be inauthentic or purely endorsing a product for personal gain. Radio and TV Presenter Zanele Potelwa says she has turned down influencer campaigns on her social media platforms when she was not completely convinced by the product or their brand message. Potelwa states "we live our lives on social media, and our followers know us". As a teetotaler, Zanele says she could not endorse any alcohol campaign, because "followers will call you out very quickly".

It is also good for marketers to remember that influencers are best used when trying to reach an audience that the traditional methods can't, or to boost a traditional radio or TV campaign. In a world where anything that looks like an ad is either skipped or ignored, the success of an influencer marketing campaign is the authentic relationship that the influencer has with their audience. When the relationship is respected, it makes for a great marketing opportunity.

When good influencers go bad

Things can go wrong, and they do. The #VWDriveDry campaign was nearly a write-off after a video showed Nomuzi Mabena (@moozlie) supposedly being involved in a car accident while posting an Insta Live video. When it was discovered that the post was a paid-for campaign and stunt, both Mabena and VWSA were confronted with some on-line backlash. There is a difference between shock and awe and bad taste.

The importance of finding synergy between the values of the brand and influencer cannot be understated. Once the virtual milk has been spilt, it is hard to wipe it up in the digital world.

Budgets have influence too

Tighter budgets and the need for more impact are making marketers consider every influenced rand. Micro and nano influencers, with less than 10,000 followers, are proving to be very successful at brand storytelling. Collaborations between brands and creators are now very strategic rather than transactional. Creators that can enhance the relationship between brand and consumer are now finding themselves in long-term deals rather than one-off campaigns and are making good use of the marketing budget that has remained.

Marvin Gaye heard it through the Grapevine, REO Speedwagon heard it from a friend who heard it from a friend and Mike

and the Mechanics believed in the Word of Mouth, all of these may have got the message sooner had they also heard it from an influencer. Log in, click, like and share all the cool kids are and brands love it!

ABOUT CANDY DEMPERS

Candy Dempers has loved all things media for twenty-three years. A sales and marketing specialist, her first love was radio and bringing brands and platforms together. View my profile and articles...

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