

Agencies, eat your own dog food

By [Catherine Luckhoff](#)

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Phew, the digital, mobile and social media space is certainly hotting up recently. There have been more announcements and moves in this space than you can shake a stick at. And, while this is all very exciting and it's great to see such buoyancy after 2009's doom and gloom, as a PR and communications consultant, I am feeling a touch of unease.



Primarily, I am concerned about unrealistic expectations being set up with clients by agencies, often followed by poor implementation by people who haven't truly engaged in the space for a significant period of time. I fear this disjoint will ultimately lead to the PR and communications industry being given a bad name - as it was by the champagne-and-stilettos brigade in the 1990s.

Not only that, though, if South African companies don't get this social, mobile and digital media thing right, they will lose the biggest opportunity they have to grow their businesses and be successful.

Things that have made me raise a sceptical eyebrow recently include:

1. What's with the silo approach?

Certainly, the announcement of a new division gets an agency attention, but just how does it work to have all your social media "rock stars" sitting at one end of the agency when it comes to running integrated communication campaigns?

Social media, online and mobile needs to be considered at strategy and conceptualisation stage, and then implemented coherently across the board. At MANGO-OMC we're seeing more and more that we are required to take both a strategic and project manager role on behalf of our clients, bringing together different communication channels and technologies, overseeing an integrated campaign and serving as chief gatekeeper for brand messages.

2. Huh? A community manager that sits outside the company they represent?

It is highly, highly unlikely that an agency will know your company as well as you do. And, given that one of the key requirements for a successful social media engagement is authenticity, you're stumbling before you are even out the box if your agency convinces you that it can look after this function.

What your agency can do, however, is work with you on strategy, set in place the foundations of effective social media engagement with the customers in your target market, and guide and coach you on maintaining an effective and successful conversation.

3. Social media experts with 25 Twitter followers and 10 tweets?

Imagine walking into a Hell's Angels convention wearing a pink pleather jacket and carrying a scooter helmet with the

price tag still attached. And expecting to be taken seriously. Not going to happen.

It's the same thing with social media; you only truly understand the space and engage authentically if you are genuinely part of it in your own capacity. Else at best you are going to get ignored, but more likely laughed at and then ignored.

4. Over-emphasising the impact of social and digital media in South Africa.

Get real. Yes, it's a rapidly growing wave, and, yes, you almost definitely need to get on it. But throw out everything else you are doing? Probably not.

Let's take a look at some numbers: 2.3 million South Africans are active Facebook users every month; 467 500 South Africans have a Twitter account; and 5.3 Million South Africans have Internet access. But amongst our population of more than 47 million, traditional media blows these stats out the water.

Umhlobo Wenene FM has 4.3 million listeners a week, and *The Sowetan*, a regional newspaper, has more than 2 million readers a day. So, decide whom you want to reach, and find out where they are actively engaging, rather than jumping on the latest and most edgy fad.

What is key, though, is to maximise all your communications and PR efforts by integrating and amplifying them across the various channels you have chosen.

5. Don't forget about mobile.

And I don't mean mobile Internet only: according to Arthur Goldstuck from World Wide Worx there are 50 million mobile phone connections in South Africa, and about 36 million individual subscribers.

There are heaps of cool, interactive things you can do with a bog standard mobile phone. Just tread carefully, as South Africans have been bitten one too many times by unscrupulous subscription offers.

And make sure that what is happening on the mobile phone is aligned with what is happening in the rest of the campaign.

This is too important an opportunity to get things wrong. Agencies, start [eating your own dog food](#).

And South African companies, notch up the scepticism a few levels the next time you are speaking to the latest social media rock star.

For more:

- Bizcommunity Search: [PR & social media](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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