

DigiChat with Andrea: Social media ROI

 By [Andrea Mitchell](#)

26 Aug 2014

Recent research conducted by Fuseware and World Wide Worx examined the social media and social business activities of Africa's top 200 companies, and reports that 93% of major brands use Facebook, 79% use Twitter, 58% YouTube, 46% LinkedIn and 28% Pinterest.

But do social media deliver the returns that brands expect, and do brands truly understand what social media requires, and what it can deliver?

Too often, the number of followers or likes is defined as an indication of success, leaving scant thought to any other impact social media is making.

Here are a few considerations:

Should every brand invest in social media?



Karen Lowe, Joint Managing Director, [Go4Word](#):

This is not a simple yes or no answer. South African marketers seem to have fallen into three camps with regard to social media: some have not ventured in yet, some have jumped in because they feel they "have to be there", while only a small minority of businesses are coming to terms with the need to integrate their social media efforts with their content strategy; and are slowly starting to see the impact of social media in terms of lead generation, referral traffic, and revenue.

That said, category matters. Some topics are less popular topics for discussion, both offline and online. Consumers just don't make connections with certain types of products/brands, and that makes some categories less relevant for marketers looking at social media. The barriers to gaining "fans" are significantly higher for some categories. This cuts to one of the core issues surrounding social media - it is controlled by users, for users.

If we approach this from the standpoint of viewing how consumers can easily create online content about (and around) a brand, then we need to consider what impact this content has on their decision to do business with the brand.

A business should consider the role that online content plays with regards to their products and services, and how this influences consumers before they make a purchase.

Companies considering social media for their brands should also assess their willingness to relinquish control of the conversations taking place about their brands, and be prepared to invest in content created for social media. Good content is not re-purposed advertising content, nor is it rehashed information you can get on the brand's official homepage. Companies must be willing to be open and transparent, and admit failings and shortcomings rather than hide behind policies and procedures. They also need to have the budget and resources to ensure social media is able to deliver real ROI.

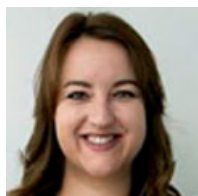


JP Kloppers, CEO, [BrandsEye](#):

Every brand should invest in social media, whether they have a presence or they're just aware of the conversation relevant to them. Therefore, I think the question isn't really whether every brand should invest in social media; it's what the investment should look like for different brands. Today, no brand

can afford to ignore the medium, but that's not to say that all brands need to invest in a social media presence. They may just want to be listening to social media conversations taking place on a variety of platforms which are relevant to their industry or brand, the data from which they could use to inform business, marketing AND social media strategy.

The type of investment made by a brand will vary depending largely on their objectives for dedicating resources to social media. Is it to create a larger online share of voice (SOV)? To expand its community and audience? Client retention and sales? Or to measure progress in benchmarking against competitors? Only once a brand's objectives are set, can the type of social media investment be determined.



Emily Shaw, Digital Strategist, [Liquorice](#):

It depends entirely on the potential content strategy, objectives and selected channels. For some brands it's a no-brainer. Do I want to follow a big retailer on Twitter? Yes - the expected output of content and conversation will probably be of relevance to me and I can watch the brand for sales and promotions and moan about not enough mayo on my sandwich. Liking the Facebook page of my preferred brand of tampon or sanitary product? My knee-jerk reaction would be no. But what if that tampon brand's strategy was to connect a community of women who can only walk their dogs at night (but don't because they're scared to walk in the dark alone) with others in their area, so they can walk together? Then not only has the tampon brand given me something I really wanted, it has also seamlessly aligned itself with the values of safety, women-power, solidarity, positivity, exercise - which all add up to equity and power-of-mind which I'm sure are objectives on most brands' lists. It's a superficial example but shows how well-built brands with concise and creative (but appropriate) strategies can shift mind-sets in social spaces. When these imperatives aren't in place failure is inevitable.

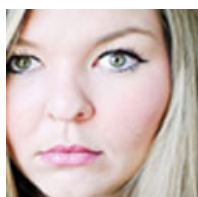


Rachel Irvine, Managing Director, [Irvine Bartlett](#): From a public relations perspective, there's definitely been a sense that every brand must somehow be active on social media. However, in my opinion, I think this notion is forgetting the most basic fact of communications. While social media certainly has been a sea change in the communications business, it hasn't changed the most basic rules of communications: engagement needs to be planned and well thought out.

As I see it, yes, brands should invest in social media, but that investment can end in simply saying, "after research, we are of the opinion that the current social media platforms available do not meet our overall marketing requirements."

There are many agencies promising that social media can be the panacea for a struggling brand. But the truth is that for social media marketing to be in any way effective, it has to fit in with current marketing plans and be an arena in which your target market is active. The only way you'll achieve *effective* social media marketing is by investing in research on it and how your brand can best use it.

So when I say, "Yes, every brand should invest in social media" I don't necessarily mean every brand should go out there and open accounts on all social channels. Rather, I mean, invest time, energy, and resources into researching what can, or won't work for your brand. Brands need to be able to strongly justify why it is they are, or aren't active on social media.



Mercia Lampen, Social Media Manager, [Flight Centre](#):

Social media is the "word of mouth" of digital marketing. Having just a website is not enough anymore. Today people are looking for instant gratification more and more and brands can use social media to respond to this new "immediate lifestyle". This does not mean you have to be on each and every social platform - you must know your target market and choose the platforms they are active on.

All businesses can use more awareness, and social media can certainly help increase customer loyalty. At a minimum, if your target audience is on Facebook and Twitter, you should create placeholder pages that give basic information and redirect people to your website.

According to Hubspot, 92% of marketers in 2014 claimed that social media marketing was important for their business, with 80% indicating their efforts increased traffic to their websites. According to Social Media Examiner, 97% of marketers are currently participating in social media-but 85% of participants aren't sure what social media tools are the best to use. This demonstrates a huge potential for social media marketing to increase sales, but a lack of understanding on how to achieve those results.



Natalie Jardine, Marketing Manager, [New Media](#):

After almost a decade of fighting for this goal, we're finally at a point where CEOs are starting to agree that digital is the way of the future, and that communication and marketing strategies need to take this into account. For those of us who've been fighting to get to this day, it's quite liberating.

It's fantastic that digital communications and activations are no longer the last in the line to receive whatever is left over of marketing budgets, but part of the plan from the start.

When looking at how digital marketing money is being spent however, I'm concerned that we are getting carried away.

On an anecdotal basis, for instance, we're seeing brands pop up in the most peculiar of spaces doing things that are entirely out of step for who they are. With the explosive growth of Snapchat, to give one example, we're already seeing a tsunami of articles professing how brands should use this service.

But putting our marketer hats aside for a second, do we really want our bank sending us pictures or videos that self-delete after 10 seconds?

Suddenly flush with money, the basic fact we are ignoring, is that not every company needs a blog, presence on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, or whatever other social network is out there. Even fewer, if we're honest, need an app.

In our zeal to create communities that are real, engaged, and translate to customer retention or new business leads, we're forgetting that at the end of the day, our corporate social media presences are corporate communications tools.



Kisha van Vuuren, Strategist, [Tin Can PR](#):

Forbes magazine declared earlier this year that investment in social media would no longer be a luxury, it will become necessity. While this is true, brands need to be cognisant of how social media fits into their overall communications strategy and how they tackle social media to create an impact.

All consumer-facing brands should consider investing in a social presence, but they need to look at content relevance, level of investment and weigh-in on what they hope to achieve. Investment in social media should also come with a solid strategy to measure your social media return on investment.

Brands need to consider whether or not people have the time and energy to follow them if they are not relevant to their daily lives. Before investing, make sure you have your objectives outlined and look at what you are hoping to achieve. Remember every time a consumer engages with you on a platform, it is out there for the universe to see.

What are 3 key things brands should consider before investing in social media?

Karen Lowe:

While most business owners are aware of the necessity of having a social media strategy, the majority need to understand the necessity to commit the required time and resources to their social media efforts.

In my opinion, the three most important key considerations:

1. Brands can't measure social media success without knowing their business and/or campaign objective. It's critical to align social media KPIs with specific business or campaign/project objectives and their overall digital strategy. Brands should establish goals before the start of a social media campaign and determine what kind of tracking measures they need to implement upfront. The role social media plays within a brand's broader communications mix needs to be clearly defined to ensure efforts are integrated with other elements and active customer service SLAs.
2. Social media requires a large investment in both time and resources. Brands need to understand and determine the costs involved and ensure sufficient time and budget are allocated to necessary HR and technology resources.
3. Social ROI is driven by content and content needs to be specific to the channel or platform it appears on. Most social channels are monetising their platforms through advertising. This means that brands need to invest in the people and content populating these channels. Not only do brands need to allocate adspend to grow communities and seed content, they also need to factor in the costs of community managers, campaign managers, social influencers and content producers. In order to produce the best content possible with the aim of virality/shareability, a great creative team is needed with skills across copywriting, editing, design and multimedia production.

JP Kloppers:

Firstly, identify the stakeholders, and understand the reason for the investment. Without clear objectives and expectations [being] communicated regarding the outcome of investing in social media, it will fail. There are always three broad categories of stakeholders who need to work together to deliver a social media solution: internal departments, agencies and data service providers. Having a high level discussion at the start to map out the objectives, stakeholders, roles and responsibilities is one of the smartest things a company can do to maximise the ROI.

Secondly, the strategy. This includes communicating to all stakeholders the objectives of the brand on social media, the type of content being communicated, and knowing which social platforms are best suited to the brand and its communications. For example, if the objective is to improve customer retention by quickly addressing more customer-care queries online, a social media objective might be to respond to all product and service-related questions posted online by customers within a certain timeframe and with a positive result.

Thirdly, the measurement. Listening to your own communications and the conversations created by your current and potential customers means understanding the patterns and trends in their needs and preferences, as well as knowing whether the strategic objective is being met. For example, measuring and analysing the number of negative, positive and repeated queries directed at online customer service will create the insights that will inform changes to the entire business, and that will be reflected on social media in the long run. Social media thus transforms from being a neat digital add-on, to an integral source of business intelligence.

Emily Shaw:

In light of my previous comment, I would have to say that defining social media objectives for the brand would be number one. Why does your brand want to be on Facebook/Pinterest/Twitter/LinkedIn? What will you say to people once you have them assembled there? Why will what you say matter to them? And how will it ultimately drive feet in-store/orders off your website/donations to your cause?

Once objectives are defined, brands need to ask what they will say to consumers that will be of value (both to people and to the brand itself) and ask whether or not those messages can produce on-going content that's relevant and engaging. Lastly, brands need to consider the investment of running a social conversation. Content development demands continuous original thought, topical commentary, photography, design, copywriting - and then there's the actual community management of moderation and monitoring. Brand needs to recognise the significant input required for successful results.

Rachel Irvine:

1. What am I hoping to achieve by investing in social media?
2. How will I measure the ROI in social media?

3. Do I have the resources for a long-term engagement on social media? (It doesn't run itself)

Mercia Lampen:

1. Do you have the resources? Remember, social media is open 24 hours, 7 days a week and your customers do expect an immediate response.
2. Who's your target market and are they on social media? If so, on which platforms? In example you will not advertise to students on LinkedIn, you'd rather use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
3. Do you have other marketing channels that support social media? Social media requires content creation that relies heavily on your supporting marketing channels - both online and offline. For example, when integrated effectively, regular blog articles, PR inserts in magazines, or TV adverts can enrich your brand's social media presence and search opportunities.

Natalie Jardine:

Social media marketing isn't about re-inventing the wheel or latching onto every new channel, network and meme out there. It is about doing what you have always done - being careful and considerate when connecting brands to people, only just on digital platforms.

Kisha van Vuuren:

From a PR perspective, we advise clients to have a strategic communications and crisis management plan in place before embarking on a social media campaign.

Employ the services of a PR firm to develop your content and look for an agency that can optimise your social media platforms.

This is not to say that we believe PR should own social media, we believe that no one should own it, it should be an agency-wide collaboration and roles clearly defined according to objectives that need to be met.

In our industry many says that they "do" social media. Make sure they can show you results driven, successful case studies and the metrics of their measurement.

Content is key, so ensure you have worthwhile content.

How should brands decide which social media channels to invest in?

Karen Lowe:

Investing in social media is no different to considering other "owned" media. It all starts with clearly identifying the brand's target audience.

Each channel offers a unique environment to engage with a brand's consumers and requires a set of objectives and resulting content strategies that align to the brand's overall communication objectives and specific social objectives. Not every channel is correct for every brand or campaign - it is key to look at what the objectives are and which channels best fulfil these objectives.

In order to identify the social channels that offer the best fit for a brand's target audience, one must identify where the fan base is, profile who they are, understand the channels they prefer, how much time they spend there, and the content they are consuming and engaging with. There is no "one size fits all" approach.

Across Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Tumblr, LinkedIn Google+ Mxit etc, each channel should be carefully

considered and social media efforts should be focused on where the brand's target audience spends their time.

JP Kloppers:

It's not usually recommended that a brand dive into the deep end and try to manage content on several platforms at once. Find out where your current and targeted audience is online, and start from there. A great way to do so is to set up monitoring for various relevant topics, brands and the industry to analyse this audience first, before trying to cater to it.

Additionally, the content being pushed out must be relevant to the social media platform. Monitoring the content disseminated by your competitors and the reception of it by their audience is a great place to start.

Emily Shaw:

It's pointless being somewhere your audience isn't, so an analysis of who's on what channel is a start. Again, your objectives will guide your choice - if it's reach you're after, you're better off building a presence on Facebook than you are on Instagram. But if it's targeted communication to a very specific audience, you might want to look into LinkedIn rather than Twitter. Your channel selection will also depend on your content strategy and resources - what do you want to say and how often/with what kind of content do you want to say it?

Rachel Irvine:

You need to first find out if your target consumer is active on a given social network. What good does it do for your B2B brand that needs to speak to C-Suite executives to open an Instagram account?

You also need to know that your brand's actual product or service can be used to create the kind of content that is popular on a social network. If you're a bakery, then by all means you should open that Pinterest account.

Second is what resources (and by this I mean actual staff or team-members) does one have to commit to managing social media? The reason it's called social media management, is because it's more than simply posting something on a network. Social media is about communicating with, rather than to your audience. To communicate "with" needs constant monitoring of your social channels.

Mercia Lampen:

That depends - on the type of business that you have, who your customers are, and what you want to achieve with your social media marketing. For some companies, Twitter is a great social tool that provides many benefits; but for others, it is not worth the investment. The same goes for all social media channels. This is why it's important to assess your company's fit with social media platforms on a case by case basis.

Natalie Jardine:

It's a very simple equation really. Brands need to first ascertain what it is they're looking to achieve with their social media strategy. Are you looking to build establish your brand in consumers' minds (create brand recognition), build a community around an existing brand that is already established in consumer's minds, or generate business leads? Once you have established that, you then need to find the social media channel your audience is most likely to be open to receiving your message. When you answer those questions, you'll be able to tell where you should be spending time any money - it might end up not even being social media at all.

Kisha van Vuuren:

Your social media goals and resulting strategies must align with your platforms; find where your audience spends their time and where they enjoy engaging with brands.

Look at what you are hoping to achieve - look at the audience, look at your target market and where you will be most relevant and engaging.

Look at the channels available and how they fit into the overall communications channel eco-system.

What should brands be focussing on as a measurement of success in social media channels?

Karen Lowe:

Social ROI can be measured in a number of ways: reach, engagement, brand sentiment and reputation, customer acquisition, lead generation, clicks, conversion rates, social commerce/revenue generation, competition entries, and facilitating active customer service.

The primary challenge when measuring ROI is keeping up with changes in algorithms, testing and implementing relevant new software tools and actually proving to clients that they are achieving ROI.

Once performance targets are defined and agreed upon, it is possible to anticipate what data will be required to accurately measure the performance of targets and specific campaigns, and this will guide the analytics applied to the data.

JP Kloppers:

A brand's measurement of success is entirely reliant on the social media objectives set. A social media objective that aims to address all customer service queries communicated online will only be successful if all customer service queries are addressed at the end of the period. Ways to measure customer service success ranges from driving down negative sentiment, and the reach of this negative sentiment, response times to queries and closing the loop of the conversation online.

If, for example, the social media objective is centred around brand building, some of the measurements of success might be:

- Improving share of conversation scores versus competitors' by improving positive brand sentiment;
- Increasing brand engagement by consumers;
- Increasing the number of credible authors and influencers talking about the brand;
- And significant profile growth (increased number of followers) over the period.

Emily Shaw:

Success means different things to different brands - because all brands want to achieve different objectives. That said, most brands will want to speak to as many people within their audience as possible, so a brand's reach will be a measurement of work well done. Engagement is also an obvious measurement - the more your content is (positively) interacted with, the more relevant and valuable it is. That's a good indication your message is being received and your brand is jostling for top of mind status with your consumer.

Rachel Irvine:

There are countless metrics which can be used in measuring social media success. But before I list a few, remember that social media success to your particular brand may not be as easily tangible to the next brand. For instance, getting a thought-leader in your industry to take note of your brand and what it is doing may be far more important to you than 1,000 retweets.

Of course the most "traditional" (in this most non-traditional of channels) way of measuring social success is measuring the reach, audience make-up, peak traffic, etc of your social media activities.

There are, however, other ways in which to look measure social media success. By engaging in this social media activity, are you saving time or money? To a point, social media gives you a free platform to communicate with your consumers. How much would you have paid to reach that same audience? Also, how much time would you have spent having the conversations you have with your customers on social media?

Social media has been a sea-change in how we communicate, but to think that the traditional ways of measuring ROI can be easily applied to social media is somewhat short-sighted.

Mercia Lampen:

The different platform's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for example:

- Facebook : post likes, comments, reach, shares and website conversions
- Twitter : followers, retweets, favourites, mentions etc and website conversions
- LinkedIn : likes, comments, shares etc. and website conversions

The key, is to ensure you measure whatever objective has been set.

Natalie Jardine:

This depends on what it is the brand in question is looking to achieve from their social media strategy. A new brand which is looking to establish itself and a brand that wants to generate business leads using social media will have entirely different measures of success when it comes to social media marketing.

Kisha van Vuuren:

Ensure you have clearly outlined objectives and KPIs as this is very important in terms of measuring success. Without them, it will be very difficult to determine the level of success the brand is achieving on social media.

Which social media monitoring tools would you recommend and what should brands be looking for in an online monitoring tool?

Karen Lowe:

There are a variety of monitoring tools available. These can be broadly classified into multiplatform versus single platform analytics tools and free versus paid. We make use of multiple tools across campaign management and deployment, listening and in-depth reporting and analytics.

Not a week passes without an email or call from a company promising the latest, cutting edge social media tracking software. Whilst we don't feel the need to experiment with every new piece of software that emerges, we have a responsibility to our clients to select the best of what's on offer that fits within their budget constraints.

Some of the free tools we use for monitoring:

- Klout
- Facebook Insights
- Google Analytics
- Bitly
- TAGS V5

As a brand's social media presence grows, companies will need to consider investing in some 3rd party analytic tools. For listening and more in-depth reporting and analytics and depending on the pre-set performance targets set, we will select service providers based on their ability to deliver on specific metrics, provide multiple channel support and offer specific features such as competitive analysis and benchmarking, influencer and trend tracking, brand, keywords and hashtag

monitoring etc.

Our most frequently used paid tools (client dependent) include:

- Hootsuite Enterprise
- SocialBro
- Social Bakers
- Brandseye
- Radian 6

JP Kloppers:

Look for great data first of all. There are many fly-by-night operators promising the world but with very little infrastructure to back it up. Then look for partners who can help you make sense of the data. Make sure that the tool you choose can sift through the high levels of noise out there to find you relevant conversation with accurate sentiment analysis. These online consumer insights are going to inform key strategic decisions, so ensure you choose a partner who will back the precision of their measurement.

Immediate alerts and notifications are also important to ensure any risks to the brand are identified and responded to quickly and appropriately.

A flexible and fast interface for working with large amounts of data, which can be visualised quickly and easily understood is imperative. I would add to this, that having first hand access to the underlying data is also immensely powerful.

Lastly, if you're looking to integrate data into a current platform and to overlay it with other business intelligence tools, then choosing a provider with an API is also something to consider.

Mercia Lampen:

- Hootsuite (Free for up to three accounts)
- Facebook Insights (Free and available if you have a page)
- Tweetreach (hashtags and brands report)
- Socialmention (in my opinion one of the best free social listening tools)

Emily Shaw:

I like Social Bakers - and a lot of manual monitoring as well.

Rachel Irvine:

First of all, the number of monitoring tools available to us has increased dramatically. Only a few years ago we were limited to a handful, there are now hundreds, if not thousands. The reason for this proliferation is that when it was only a handful, what we thought social media could achieve for our brands was laughably limited. Back then we monitored social media for crisis management and prevention, primarily.

Today, however, that is only one arena in which social media monitoring is used. Social media monitoring can now be used when it comes to product development, and perhaps most importantly customer relations.

Therefore the first recommendation I would give when it comes to these tools is knowing what kind of measurement it is you're looking to do.

I don't necessarily want to promote one tool over another, but I will say that just because a tool is free, doesn't mean that it is sub-par, or that if it is developed overseas, it's better than something home-grown. The majority of the paid services do

offer free trial periods, so whoever is in charge of handling your brand's social presence, should compare and contrast these services.

Natalie Jardine:

There are numerous free social media monitoring tools available to brands where budget is a serious concern. However, if you really want to be able to extrapolate serious data from your social media, I would suggest looking to the paid services.

I don't necessarily recommend any one single service, but I will say that some of the South African developed social media monitoring services are as good - and in some cases even better - than the international ones.

Kisha van Vuuren:

There is an abundance of free and paid-for social media monitoring tools available, each with their own benefits. I think it depends on what you're monitoring, the level of monitoring and how much data or information you need to obtain from your monitoring.

Tweetreach is free and monitors how far your tweets travel and measures the actual impact and implications of social media discussions.

Topsy is a fantastic tool and has become part of our daily monitoring. Although it is paid for and not cheap, it's worth the investment, as you can monitor all social media channels in one place. The reports are also incredibly user friendly and detailed.

Conclusion:

Social media is no longer a case of simply being present in social channels. It's clear that a well thought out strategy alongside a complete understanding of the objectives and what's possible, along with a competent team to deliver on the various facets are required in order to make social media a viable investment.

ABOUT ANDREA MITCHELL

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