

The importance of social media for successful e-commerce in South Africa

 By Pieter Groenewald

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A recent survey conducted by [Sortlist](#) revealed that South Africa ranks fourth globally when it comes to the amount of time people spend online every day.



Source: www.unsplash.com

Totalling a whopping 10 hours and six minutes and adding up to about 154 days a year. The figure is impressive, not in the least because current statistics indicate that just 64% of the population have internet access to begin with.

E-commerce survey

We at The Salt were inspired to dig deeper and in July, conducted our own session in the form of a [South African e-commerce survey](#) to better understand what this meant.

We wanted to understand just what South Africans are getting up to online and ultimately what it means for businesses who sell, or are thinking of selling, their services and products online.

A significant insight that came out of the investigation was that South Africans are spending more time on social media than

ever before. The Sortlist survey corroborates this finding, with results showing that of the collective 154 days online, 54 of these are dedicated exclusively to social media.



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The internet is undergoing a global social revolution. Nearly all of the 4.8 billion internet users worldwide are also on social media, totalling some 4.5 billion people. That means 57% of the people in the world are using social media.

But it's not simply a question of being social. Social media channels are increasingly important when it comes to the rise of social commerce, a form of marketing that uses social media as vehicles to promote and sell products and services online.

Social media and brands

The influence and importance of social media in the path to purchase is undeniable, with 77% of internet users surveyed advising that they use social media when looking for more information on brands. When it came to the percentage of users surveyed who were asked how they typically find out about new brands or products, 64% advised that social media once again stood at the forefront of this process.

These statistics speak to a fundamental shift in the role played by social media. Where once users resorted to Google or online retailers as the starting point for finding out more, now social media and social networks play a significant role through processes that are driven by curiosity and discovery, scrolling (rather than putting in distinct search queries), ease of use via mobile, emotional and impulse decision-making, and connections with existing customers (or influencers) in order to direct their experience of a brand and similarly, their decision to purchase.



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The Salt estimates that by 2025, South Africa's e-commerce market will reach more than R400 billion on the back of 1 billion transactions per annum, making a strong argument that an e-commerce sales presence is fast becoming (if not already) a must for businesses and brands who want to remain relevant.

Similarly, with such an emphasis on social media, there is a great need for businesses and brands to adapt their messaging in order to meet their potential customers where they are – online, and more accurately, on social networks.

But the truth is, just having a business or brand Facebook or Instagram page isn't enough. Consumers are increasingly aware of the need to make ethical purchasing choices, driving their desire to buy from businesses that align to their values, that are authentic, and often, locally, and sustainably made.

It's therefore important to build trust and customer loyalty. As for the how of actually doing this? Storytelling, both through the content you employ and the influencers with whom you partner.

ABOUT PIETER GROENEWALD

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