

Why your brand's missing out if it's not taking social seriously

By [Leigh Andrews](#)

2 Aug 2017

Mike Stopforth of Cerebra, often dubbed 'the godfather of social media in SA,' began the Red & Yellow School's Executive Education workshop on social media by explaining what's happened in the realm in the last ten years to help us understand what might happen in the next ten.

If you've ever referred to social media as 'social not-working' or as a 'weapon of mass disruption', clearly your brand isn't leveraging the many free platforms at our disposal as part of your overall communications strategy. That's where the Red & Yellow School's Executive Education series fits in.



Red & Yellow launches Executive Education Workshop Series

Red & Yellow 31 May 2017



Chevaun Herholdt, brand communications manager at Red & Yellow School, introduced this as part of the school's rebrand. It's an important one because while academia typically doesn't evolve as fast as tech does, there's no better time to prepare the inventors of tomorrow.



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She then let Stopforth wield his magic, kicking off two days of learning and sharing our own experiences about a very broad topic as Stopforth believes, "the best way to learn is to share, the worst is to have someone lecture at you." That alone made this workshop worthwhile.

The wonders of the web

In discussing our expectations of the workshop, attendees' responses ranged from the established companies and legacy brands that are scared of the wild-fire spread of social but acknowledge the need to get involved, to tertiary-level students scoping it out as a career path. Stopforth thus got everyone on a level playing field from the start, as social is a strategic business imperative.

Sharing his own social business path, explained that he started Cerebra in 2006 as he had an unsettling suspicion that something big was happening with 'web 2.0'. Cerebra's intention was to get people to solve the intranet problem and engage with employees better – then Facebook arrived, and soon they were "the one-eyed man in the kingdom of blind people," enjoying a significant advantage as those that didn't take the plunge quickly got left in the dark. Over the years, the business has had moments of inflection points based on decisions on whether to diversify with media as part of the mandate or not, ultimately deciding to keep specialising and going deeper into the world of social and its impact on human beings, organisations and politics.

Stopforth added that the best way to keep learning is to teach and teach he did, talking us through a worldview of social media, understanding the platforms, social business transformation and the engagement framework.



Blinkers are fine if you're a horse, not if you're running a business. Elena Levitina © – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

It's about knowing what to say, to which audience, in which tone of voice, on which platforms, at which specific time in order to use social media effectively as a business tool. Stopforth said, "It doesn't matter who we speak to, clients face the constant battle of not making their complexity the customers' problem." Similarly newbies often come into the industry with passion, but that creativity and humanity is stripped out in an attempt not to screw up. Here's what you need to keep in mind to keep that passion and use social media effectively.

Social media: The risk and the promise

First, we need to realise that every risk we navigate in the social media realm is to do with the gap between expectations and reality. So much of what business does today is commoditised, and important considerations from the Industrial Age no longer matter. We need a bit of a wake up in that regard across the board.

Stopforth adds that the vitriolic anger that comes out on Twitter when customers complain is often disproportional to the experience and brand promise. As brands, we work so hard to create a specific perception but this dynamic is the unforeseen result. The lowest common denominator in what's changed over the past ten years is that customers are now publishing their thoughts and this process has been democratised. The last time we had such a significant change was when the invention of the printing press made the illiterate literate. No wonder some businesses are running scared.

Sadly, many then run with a shaky strategy and the innate belief that simply being on a social media platform will make the brand social. Instead, we need to contribute something meaningful to make an impact as participants. It's a process rare to prove an overnight success.

Stopforth quoted the following from a [Guardian.com article](#) by Katharine Viner, on how technology has disrupted the truth:

“ [Social media] has become the dominant way for people to find news on the internet – and in fact, it is dominant in ways that would have been impossible to imagine in the newspaper era... [it] hasn't just swallowed journalism, it has swallowed everything. It has swallowed political campaigns, banking systems, personal histories, the leisure industry, retail, even government and security. ”

In essence, our world views are largely informed and enforced by the brands and people we choose to follow and associate with. Brands therefore need to understand their responsibility, and that as a consumer, your brand is the experience we associate with your company, not its logo. These experiences are then shared and searchable and archived online in what consumers tell their friends online. It's a difficult, disruptive principle to understand as it takes a bit of the 'social' away from social media. Stopforth added that we all sense something big has happened and affected our lives, most of us now check social media before we are fully awake. So 50 years from now we will look back and wonder how we didn't realise what we had created...

“ And that's a wrap on the first day of the Social Media for Leadership workshop. Time for sundowners on the rooftop.

[#RYExecEd pic.twitter.com/Ls1frbmQUB](#)— Red & Yellow (@redyellowschool) [August 2, 2017](#) ”

[Click here](#) to view Stopforth's MyBiz profile, [here](#) for Red & Yellow School's press office and [here](#) to access Cerebra's free downloads.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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