

Take a step down the social media influencer route

 By [Samantha Wright](#)

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Social media influencers are beginning to play a much larger role in brand communications in South Africa.

Any PR or marketing professional worth their salt appreciates the big role that bloggers can play in promoting a brand. To illustrate my point, [Ignitespot](#) recently revealed these statistics:

- 77% of internet users read blogs
- 70% of consumers learn about companies through articles rather than advertisements.
- 81% of US consumers trust the advice and information from blogs.
- 61% of US consumers make a purchase based on a blog post.

I'm aware these statistics refer to the US market, but Brands Eye communicated 2013 statistics relating to South African social media users and I think, it is safe to say, that we're definitely moving in the same direction as our American and European counterparts (to read those social media statistics follow Brands Eye on twitter: [@Brandseye](#)).

Blogging works

Up until now though, we've struggled to equate the actual reach of a blog post or the influence truly of the writer behind the post... Never mind determining return on investment. It's no longer about one of the people in the office mentioning a "cool blog" they follow, sending said blogger some free merchandise and hoping for the best. In the same vein, when bloggers have been asked for statistics or analytical data it isn't always possible to prove the information is legitimate. Just because someone has more than 2,000 followers on twitter doesn't necessary mean they're an influencer in the true sense of the word. The great South African twitter scandal of 2012 jumps to mind here...

A handful of "influencers" were found to be purchasing followers which bought their actual influence and reach into question (2OceansVibe radio did an interesting piece on this story that you can [read here](#)).

Spotted the gap

Retroviral seems to have seen the gap though and have filled it with Webfluential, which they launched on 26 September 2013. The idea behind this platform is to provide brands, marketing folk, and PR agencies a means to identify online influencers that are relevant to their various campaigns. This isn't new; someone could argue that anyone with adequate Google skills could find a blog or social media user that may just fit a campaign. Other platforms offering a similar service to Webfluential are also currently available in South Africa. However, where Webfluential is different is in the algorithms... Of course there was going to be some tech speak.

According to Murray Legg, the co-founder of Stratos Capital (one of Retroviral's partners in this project) Webfluential's algorithms measure influence by looking at each individual's reach, resonance, and relevance by interpreting the numbers behind their social interactions. So what that means is that Webfluential is providing the brand with accredited "influencers". The "influencers" on the site will have to have met certain minimum requirements. As a brand you'll also be able to pinpoint particular niches, location, and audience and on which platform an influencer is influential.

Removing the guesswork

Mike Sharman, the owner of Retroviral, believes Webfluential will "eliminate the guesswork that has limited the effectiveness of many social influencer engagements until now, boosting the legitimacy of social communication channels for all audiences involved."

There is no doubt that Webfluential is going to change the social media landscape in South Africa. Europe and the States introduced legislation awhile back to ensure greater transparency between paid-for content and actual editorial on blogs and twitter. They've forged ahead when it comes to understanding the relationship between brands and bloggers better.

We needed a platform like this, but I'm not sure we should be writing off "smaller" influencers just yet though. While their numbers might be lower or their following less - I'm not sure numbers truly dictate influence. A smaller influencer with more niche interests (and a small following who shares said interests) will likely have better results on a campaign targeting those interests than say a bigger influencer, whose following is greater and probably less likely to take notice of the niche project.

To illustrate my point, you want to sell tickets to a roller hockey event (a somewhat small sport) and create exposure - a blogger with a sports blog may have an extremely large following and readership in comparison to say, a dedicated roller hockey blog. But when it comes to selling tickets? The smaller following would probably be more likely to buy tickets to the event. But, the bigger blog will gain the event more exposure albeit not necessarily the ticket sales... Your strategy cannot always be solved with algorithms.

Ideally, if we're smart we'll employ the likes of Webfluential along with some human musing.

However, there is no doubt that social media influencers are beginning to play a much larger role in brand communications in South Africa. Webfluential is just the next step down an exciting path for marketing enthusiasts.

ABOUT SAMANTHA WRIGHT

SamWright is a full-time content creator at techgirl.co.za - she is a gaming and technology blogger and YouTuber, as well as an Esports MC and broadcaster who went on to host some of South Africa's first million-rand competitions before heading overseas, where she has hosted at Gamescom (Europe's biggest gaming expo) and in China (for a \$850,000 tournament). She currently consults to brands on how to reach a switched-on generation...

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