

# The social web will be mobile

 By [Herman Manson](#)

7 Apr 2010

Angus Robinson believes that growth in social media, especially in Africa, will be driven by mobile phones and estimates that Nigeria has seen a 340% increase in Facebook usage over the past year - mostly driven from access via mobile handsets. Robinson is one of four keynote speakers at the Habari Media Digital Symposium taking place 7-8 April 2010 at Spier wine estate outside of Stellenbosch. [\[twitterfall\]](#)



Robinson is the founder and CEO of Brandsh Media, a mobile and social media agency. He chatted to Bizcommunity ahead of the symposium.



***Bizcommunity: What are the key trends in the mobile space right now that is also relevant to South Africans?***

**Angus Robinson:** We believe that social networks in South Africa and the rest of Africa will be predominantly mobile. The vast number of mobile phones in Africa and the need for people to connect with each other in other African countries with expensive telecoms means that social networks will become the predominant force for intra- and intercontinental communication.

MXit is a hugely successful SA product, which has been widely accepted - and not only by the youth. It is fast getting to the point where it could be detrimental to many brands to exclude MXit from their campaigns.

Mobile banking is a hot industry, with most of the biggest SA banks jostling for the most comprehensive mobile banking offering at the best rates. It's about providing banking services to the "unbanked", thereby increasing the customer base - a major focus for SA's financial services. This push has extended beyond mobile access to transactional accounts, and includes mobile to mobile transfers, mobile wallets and mobile specific currencies such as Standard Bank's MiMoney.

Smartphones and their associated App Stores are the current hotspots internationally. Africa and SA will be different as our numbers are significantly smaller. SA has approximately 75000 iPhones and although this will continue to grow, the 40 million other users must be considered. SMS, USSD (real-time/instant messaging phone services) and simple mobile sites are all great interaction mechanisms for the majority of South Africans.

In terms of applications and smartphones - I believe that significant progress can be made in Africa by using donor funding to provide NGOs, charities and research projects with smartphones with applications that assist in improving access to information, location-based trading services, rural healthcare and similar services.

***Biz: Lots of South Africans are using mobile to access social media. Do you have any numbers or statistics on how many, and how we use social media via our mobiles?***

**Robinson:** We estimate that there are approximately 10- to 12-million WAP-enabled cell phone users in SA, and that is a conservative estimation.

We do know that there is a growing trend in using mobile phones, either via mobile sites or applications, to update Twitter and Facebook statuses.

In some countries, the introduction of [zero.facebook.com](#) has made a big difference in the mobile adoption of Facebook and has increased usage beyond just the promotional introductory periods.

For SA and Africa as a whole, we anticipate that access to social networks will be predominantly from mobile devices. By looking at the current subscriber numbers, it is inevitable. Nigeria has 63m, SA 44m, Kenya 15m and Ghana 12m mobile users. Better GPRS coverage, improving phones and reductions in data costs will all mean that social networking access will occur 'on the go'.

Nigeria has had 340% increase in Facebook usage over the past year. It is likely that much of this has been from mobile devices - although it is not possible to get exact web/mobile split.

***Biz: Lots of people get excited about mobile as a mass media only to realise that most users use very basic handsets. Can brands still engage with these users and how?***

**Robinson:** The majority of SA's mobile market owns more than one SIM card and therefore a number of basic handsets. Consumers capitalise on 'Starter-Pack' and 'Pre-paid' offers by toggling their phones. To properly engage with these users, companies have to market to this audience using more simple resources such as USSD, SMS and Please Call Me advertising (the value of 'free' not to be underestimated in the larger audience).

MXit is extremely cost effective and can be used on even basic handsets. As the medium continues to evolve, Brandsh has developed a content management system that allows brands to easier manage content, interactions and campaigns in this medium - with minimal delays and costs. There are continuous innovations which allow for audience interactions, such as polls, interactive games, surveys, website interactions, etc. Companies can use these interactions as opportunities to gather information about their clients and to better understand their needs. Instead of being a one-way conversation, it becomes a situation where both parties add value.

We predict that smartphone penetration will be low and data costs will remain high, and that South Africans should continue to focus on simple execution, even though it might not be as sexy.

***Biz: A large cellular provider (Autopage Cellular to be exact) has been selling my details to all sorts of organisations without my permission. Why are consumers still being subjected to such unsophisticated mobile marketing messages and how can they protect themselves?***

**Robinson:** No-one should be sent unsolicited messages randomly. The [WASPA Code of Conduct](#) (Clause 5.2.1) specifically states that organisations should have a direct and recent (six months) relationship with you, and you would reasonably expect to receive a message from them.

Should you feel that messages are being sent inappropriately, you have the right and means to lodge a complaint with WASPA ([www.waspa.org.za](http://www.waspa.org.za)) and, should the complaint be serious enough, the sanction could include significant financial penalties - especially if there are numerous complaints for the same issue.

Additionally, it would be worth checking the small-print on your Autopage Cellular contract and determine their data-sharing policies.

The best form of showing them your view would be to port to a company that can offer you the option to opt-out of any marketing communication. If they continue to do this after you have complained, then they do not deserve your business.

It is also important not to tar mobile marketing as a whole with the spam brush. Outbound SMS is just one component of mobile marketing. Sophistication in messaging comes with intelligent profiling and preference management. Push messages are where most of the issues arise, whereas 'pull' is where most engagement and interactivity is taking place.

***Biz: A lot of bloggers remain out of the traditional PR loop. How should brands approach social media from a communication point of view?***

**Robinson:** To participate in the social media space, it's important for companies to understand the medium. It's different from traditional media, in that it is no longer simply about pushing your message to consumers - it's about interacting and engaging with your audience, assessing their needs and making sure you are listening when they speak.

For PR firms, this means it would be counterproductive to simply add a blogger's name to a media list and then to distribute the press release to them when you distribute to your traditional media. It's important for PR practitioners to engage with their bloggers, to find out what angle they're looking for and to basically engage in a meaningful exchange [*the same is supposed to happen with journalists; we also loathe 'spray and pray' - managing ed*].

Social media releases (SMRs) are slowly gaining popularity in SA. We describe the SMR as a "one-stop shop" for bloggers and journalists alike - it's a hosted site where visitors can download the traditional press release, but where other pertinent information, such as additional quotes and facts, pictures, videos, sound clips and relevant links to social media platforms are available. It's about letting your public create their story, not "pushing" your story onto them. Imagine a press release that lives - that's what a SMR intends being.

For many corporates, this lack of control can be intimidating. However, the fact remains that if people are saying negative things about your brand, it's better to be in that space, where you can respond appropriately. This is where an effective online reputation management (ORM) and community management becomes incredibly important - it's an early warning system that enables you to monitor and address any online mentions of your brand. Who you are online is just as important as who you are offline.

It is also important to embrace bloggers in more than just the press release roster. Invitations to media briefings, product launches and previews, sponsorship events and similar company occasions, as well as providing demo/trial products, all go a long way towards increasing transparency and engaging a broader, influential audience.

Essentially, your brand's interaction online should be honest, informative and genuine - people very quickly see through the marketing hype.

Follow Angus Robinson on Twitter at [@angusrobinson](#) and Brandsh Media at [@brandsh](#).

Bizcommunity is the online media partner for the Habari Media Digital Symposium.

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## ABOUT HERMAN MANSON

The inaugural Vodacom Social Media Journalist of the Year in 2011, Herman Manson (@marklives) is a business journalist and media commentator who edits industry news site [www.marklives.com](#). His writing has appeared in newspapers and magazines locally and abroad, including Bizcommunity.com. He also co-founded *Brand* magazine.

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