

Africa shows its social side

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Africa is the final economic frontier. Marketers are actively looking to market their brands on the continent, yet very few are investing time and effort into the continent to really understand it; even less into its social media habits.

Mike Stopforth, CEO and founder, Cerebra, maintains that over the last five to six years of business, social media has forced companies, globally, to acknowledge the humanity of their brand and their staff.

"It is not about Facebook or the actual channels, but about people connecting and communicating differently than before. A company that says we want to be social and assumes that if they have a Twitter account and videos on YouTube they are... that's just wrong.

"The better discussion to have with clients is about the principles that drive successful social engagement. These include radical trust, collaboration, participation... none of which are really the traditional characteristics of industrial age business, which are more about silos, cogs in the wheel, etc. The social era has forced us to acknowledge the humanity of our clients and employees.'

Africa plays by its own rules

How these principles are disrupting industry is important he says. "It is already happening off line in Africa. Africa does not play by our rules and corporate rules. Globally social media is disrupting the traditional accepted ways of doing business. This "collaborative economy" is growing and Africa is very much a part this especially as it comes online more and more."

He says while there has been a social profile scramble; the promise of solutions to customers was divorced from the business delivery. 'Essentially what started as we want more likes has become a business tool. Clients ask us daily if there is a correlation between effective social engagement and commercial success. Is effective social marketing and branding guarantees financial results?"

This he says is what led them to the Cerebra 2013 Social Business Africa Report. "We wanted to answer the question posed above as well as: If a brand is good at engaging socially and with its staff internally, is there a correlation between this successful engagement and making money?"

Comprehensive study

The result is a 107-page comprehensive study, compiled by Cerebra and powered by Fuseware, on the social engagement

of leading corporations on the continent. Fuseware, a social analytics authority, monitored documented and analysed the external engagement of Africa's top 200 companies. These companies were selected by revenue and the list was drawn from the Top African Companies report conducted by Africasia.com. Each company had their public Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube channel monitored and benchmarked.

"It was felt that these three social platforms drive the biggest majority of online social traction surrounding Africa's top 200 companies. Stopforth adds that there are plans to expand to other social platforms such as Mxit at a later stage.

While they wanted to develop an index in a single number to list these companies in terms of factors, for example social brand equity, this was not enough. "This only tells us who engages externally. So, we also peeped behind the firewall to see how companies handle their staffs' engagement with social media, do they allow it, do they have an intranet, etc. We did qualitative as well as telephonic interviews," says Stopforth.

It's not what you might think

The Report shows us that socially Africa is very different to people's assumptions. For example we think of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter as English-language dominated, but in reality French and Arabic are the biggest social languages.

"A key insight was East Africa. Nairobi is the hub of social influence in Africa. Another key insight was that the top performing content was not in English, but in French and Arabic."

Another insight - answering the original question which led to the Report - is that the average revenue for a company with at least one active social profile was more than the average revenue for a company with no social profile. Social companies on average correlate with 63.38% more revenue than non-social companies. Companies with a higher social engagement index on average correlate with 53.37% more revenue.

Stopforth explains that this does not mean that if you have a Twitter account, your company will automatically do better. 'It's not a causality thing. And the same rules still apply: If there is a commercially viable reason for having a social profile and the company has the resources to have it, then yes, have a social profile. So ask can we resource it and can we make money out of it? The purpose of this Report is to assist you in answering these questions."

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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