

# South African retailers fall short on social media



By [Nick Paul](#)

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When it comes to retail service, every South African knows that sometimes this can leave a lot to be desired. There are few better ways to gauge just how serious a company is about engaging its customers on service-related issues than by checking out its social media accounts.

A recent report from Unmetric, a leading social media marketing analytics platform, shows some huge disparities between response rates, engagement and sentiments around South African retailers on Facebook during Q2 of 2016.

The report delves into a comprehensive range of businesses from supermarkets to pharmacies, clothing retailers and even touches on the travel industry. There are definite trends within each sector, probably the most remarkable being that supermarkets generate by far the most negative sentiment. The retailers with the highest negative engagement were South Africa's four biggest FMCG chains: Shoprite, Checkers, Pick n Pay and Woolworths, each sitting with well over 20% of their customer engagement being negative in nature. Conversely the two biggest pharmacy chains, Clicks and Dischem were the most favourably received in South Africa, with over 40% of engagement containing positive sentiment; this along with the country's largest online travel retailer, Travelstart.

A wise client of mine once said to me, "Things go wrong, that is a fact of life, it is how you deal with things when they go wrong that counts." This couldn't be truer for Pick n Pay, which had the highest number of customer posts at just shy of 1,600, coupled with it being in a sector with such high negative sentiment, it is exceptional that it has managed to respond to over 72% of all fan posts on its page. Others in the sector, such as Woolworths, sit much closer to the 50% mark.

## Vanity metrics

If you have been following social media trends over the past few years, you will have seen that vanity metrics such as fan numbers and likes have fallen from grace. Facebook will tell you, as a brand, to ditch focusing on these, especially in light of precipitous organic reach trends (the free reach your posts get when you publish them to Facebook). Page likes, otherwise known as fans, have very little purpose nowadays, other than creating some form of trust factor - if you see an advert or post from a page you have never heard of and 10 of your friends already like the page, you are more likely to trust the content.

This is why it is so surprising that some brands seem to be focussing on this metric. Truworths grew a mammoth 19% during the 3 months measured; compare that to an average of regularly below 3% organic growth month on month for most brands. It is possible there is a big rise in organic likes for it, but it seems far more likely that it is still advertising for likes, despite now having over 700,000 fans in South Africa. Pick n Pay similarly with almost 1.5 million fans saw almost 10%

growth during that period.

Without access to advertising back ends, engagements are arguably the best public depiction of how successful a brand is on social media. Dischem blasted out a staggering 20% of all posts in the sample used for this report, about 5 posts a day but only managed to get just between 4 and 6% of all engagements. This is likely due to a tactic of not promoting its posts to reach the right audience and only relying on organic reach - which as I mentioned is now near non-existent for all brands.



Mr Price on the other hand seem to be doing an incredible job of mixing great content with some promotion as it stole 42% of reactions (what used to be called post likes) in the sample.

In the eyes of Facebook, engagements are seen as progressively more important, the deeper you go: comments trump likes, shares trump comments - something Unmetric notices also. The deeper the engagement, the stronger a signal it is to Facebook that your content is valuable to the audience and should be shown to more people at a lower cost. Obviously, it is easy to like a post, it takes a lot more thought to writing a comment and it takes putting your reputation on the line by sharing a post to all your friends. With this in mind, there is a clear winner in the engagement game and that is Pick n Pay, it was number two in likes, at 13% of the total, and a whopping 32% of comments and 22% of shares.

## What did we learn?

While South African retail brands can often fall short of optimum social media marketing, there are three key areas they can focus on to improve. First, focus on getting customer service right, if your customers are happy they will be more likely to respond positively to your content. Then, post less often with higher quality content, quality over quantity is vital to success. Finally, keep boosting that content to appropriate audiences, paid promotion helps your content find the right eyes and deliver you maximum return on investment.

For more information, go to report from [Unmetric](#).

## ABOUT NICK PAUL

I started out in the world of social media growing Africa's largest Online Travel Agency, Travelstart's presence from just around 1500 followers to over 3 million across the globe, a community which was also one of the most highly engaged in the industry. A creative problem solver who values honest marketing, I believe in demystifying what happens on social so that businesses are more clued up as to how they're achieving their goals.

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