

Giving your brand the "cool factor" in 2013 (part II)



By Veli Dlamini

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This article is an extension of my previous article titled ["Giving your brand the "cool factor" in 2013 \(part I\)"](#). This time around I will be touching on the strategies that brands can use to engage with the youth market on social media and importantly to be relevant in the youth culture and pushing the point that *social media marketing is a means to an end; it's not the end itself*.

The youth's mental complexion

To create successful campaigns brand managers need to understand that today's youth do not look at each other in the same lenses as their parents did. Friendships are not cultivated on the basis of skin colour. Today's youth has a similar mental skin complexion that looks beyond race, their common identification of one another is more on shared values, cultural lifestyle and common interest.

Many marketers are still stuck in traditional era of creating campaigns based on integrated marketing communication strategies that box and compartmentalise consumers in demographics, race and so on. A new world of consumers is rising, where demographic segmentation becomes peripheral. If marketers take the time to observe, they will realise that in all platforms whether it is social media or entertainment events the youth get to gather based on shared culture or subcultures not racial grouping.

When referring to culture, I'm not talking the racial or ethnic traditional customs, this culture is about the lifestyle, pop culture, fashion, music, social media, aspirations, slang and language that the youth share daily both on the online and offline worlds.

The winning formula when marketing to the youth

Marketers need to come up with campaigns that grab the attention of this target audience in order for brands to survive and develop in today's competitive market. The campaign must penetrate the culture through a plethora of outlets, grabbing youth's attention and allegiance through relevance.

In today's world of cyber friendships and social network interaction, the youth constantly look for way to connect with other likeminded peers. Therefore brands need to come up with online and offline activations that will serve as a common thread that runs through the lives of the youth market, giving them a common experience, shared values and common interest.

If advertising agencies want to come with winning strategies for their clients, they will need to move away from the

demographic segmentation mentality. They need to spend their time trying to understand the culture of their target market. This means marketers must look at all the youth subculture elements because culture is not focused on one component.

Getting your brand to communicate with the youth market marketers need to know that Facebook or Twitter are not the culture but cyber hangout spots for the youth. Culture is a full package comprising of, the language, music, dress code, the dance moves, slang, topics of interest etc.

Social media is merely a part of youth culture not the culture itself

To reiterate the point I made in the introduction, social media marketing is a means to an end, not the end itself.

Cool is not something that brands can fake, no matter how much money you invest on social media because social networks are only one part of the culture. Brands need to understand that according to the youth cool is the essence of who you are. Therefore, your brand being on social networks does not make it cool or part of the culture.

For your brand to be relevant on social media it will need to have a personality, talk the language, display a level of comprehension on the youth's day to day challenges and engage on topics of interest. After all, you do not want your brand to be seen as using social media as an infomercial channel to sell its products and prices.

Marketers who think that youth culture is social media are getting it all wrong; social networks only serve as channels the youth use to share information with "friends" and also acquire information due to FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out). *Social media is just one piece of the puzzle in the culture and it is not the culture itself.*

The common mistake I see marketers do is spend unnecessary time and money mainly on social media neglecting all the other subculture elements that make up youth culture.

Points to remember

- Understand the values, interests, language/slang, hangouts, entertainment preference, topics of interest etc.
- Cool is not a self-proclaimed title, but it is giving to your brand based on impact, perception and relevance in culture.
- Social Media is not the culture but a part of culture
- Brands will need to invest their efforts researching all the other subculture elements not just social media

In a nutshell, for your brand message or campaign to reach the youth market, it is imperative for brand managers or advertising agencies to understand that culture is not just social media but a system of interdependent components.

The Hush Puppies story

Some years ago when I was still in the music business, my fixation was always more on trying to comprehend: why some artists or brands become more popular than others do, regardless of the effort or work put in.

I touched on the same subject one evening while having dinner with my mentor and he recommended I read a book, *Tipping Point*, by Malcolm Gladwell.

I was fascinated at how the Hush Puppies brand reached a tipping point. According to Gladwell, the brand went from being moribund, sold only to the un-hip, to a hugely successful national brand. It's all thanks to a handful of downtown New York trendsetters.

In his book, he starts the chapter by telling a story on how a group of "opinion makers" started wearing these shoes; others saw them and copied the style and the brand tipped to a point where people even drove to out-of-the-way places to buy up stocks of Hush Puppies. Then a few fashion designers used them on the walkway, and visibility reached the "tipping point". The brand then experienced a renewal that, to this day, astounds even those in the company, who had been ready to throw

in the towel.

Conclusion

- As you plan your 2013 strategy or campaign, first and foremost don't spend your budget researching only social media marketing however cover your basis and communicate to the youth using all the elements of culture.
- Secondly when it comes to creating campaigns which will make a lasting impression on the youth don't just rely mainly on your internal team whose experience and knowledge of the culture is probably influenced by the Do's and Don'ts of marketing information extracted from Google or Wikipedia.
- Thirdly bring in an external team, there are companies like our agency who understand the culture and exposed to trends as they emerge.
- Lastly pop Culture and Celebrities can also add value in giving your brand or campaign a Cool Factor and subsequently get your brand moving at 120"Coolometres" per hour on the social network avenue.

In my next article, I will talk more on how brand owners and advertising agencies can get their brand in the culture of the youth through word of mouth marketing. Imperatively I will share strategies on how marketing or account executives can get their brand campaign to be "Top of mind" in the youth culture.

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