

Facilitate a movement: the shift from mass marketing

 By [Mongezi Mtati](#)

20 Mar 2012

In a world where advertising and marketing trends change constantly, it's easy for the larger more established brands to lag behind. They aren't as agile as smaller and newer brands, and are often stuck in the *"this is how we've always done things"* frame of mind. [video]

In January 2012, I wrote about [trends that are likely to grow this year](#). At the top of my list was 1) going beyond a social media presence and 2) the rise of influencer engagement.

To date, there are two brands in particular, Absolut and Nike, which have hit the ground running, making it difficult for challenger brands to catch up and maintain the pace. A third brand, Carling Black Label, did phenomenally last year by focusing less on social media and more on influencer engagement.

What can we take away from the way in which these three brands have facilitated movements and engaged with influencers?

It all starts with an Absolut Blank

When I attended the launch of [Absolut Blank](#) on Saturday 3 March, I expected the event to be just another platform for the brand to tell us how awesome they are. I'm happy to say this expectation was not met.

Absolut has commissioned hundreds of artists worldwide, from painters to sculptors and fashion designers to musicians to create the artwork for its Absolut bottles, so it was fitting that the audience comprised an eclectic array of South African artists, entertainers and fashionistas as well as a few marketers and advertisers. The premise behind the campaign is that creatives always start with a blank space from which they weave their magic and that imagination is the only limiting factor.

While there was global and local social media integration into the launch, it was the selection of the audience of young, up-and-coming influencers which I believe will propel the building and growth of a community around this brand.

The event (with 500 guests) was small enough to give the feel of exclusivity but large enough to be a party where many new faces on the creative scene were introduced, facilitating networking and chatter in the audience. The Nelson Mandela Bridge added to the contemporary feel of the event, where the audience felt they were taking over the city, for the night.

Kudos to Absolut and Mohlaleng, which produced the event, for understanding how influencers and early adopters are changing the status quo in smaller but more effective and active groups. Gone are the days where you try to reach the most people in the shortest time. It appears this brand understands the value of quality connections (influencers), rather than quantity.

Nike Run Jozi

Nike has been listening to the voice of the South African people who are always talking about taking back the streets, and gaining more control of our communities. The team behind Nike have been inspiring runners with slogans such as "Run Free, [#RunJozi](#)", "Take back the streets" and "Run for your right to run".

Runners from all walks of life have been getting together on a weekly basis to prepare for the [Nike Run Jozi](#) 10km run taking place on Human Rights Day, Wednesday 21 March.

It has generated a lot of speak all over the social media platforms, but what's interesting to me is how it's taken it offline too, by encouraging the once-weekly session runners to get together on other days to run together. It is encouraging real-life community building not just focusing on building their brand's online community.

The [Run Jozi](#) race has 10 000 signups and, if my Facebook friends are anything to go by, many of these runners are not regular athletes. They are members of the community that have been inspired by this initiative to come together and take back their streets, one bold stride at a time.

While they're not doing a hard sell, what this marketing activity has done for me personally is remind me that Nike still exists as a brand in South Africa. As someone who grew up with a mission to own a pair of Nike, Reebok or Spalding branded shoes - I've noticed how they've faded into the background over the years. When I brave the doorstep of a sporting goods store, what I'm seeing on the shelves is mostly Asics seeming to dominate the SA market, leaving its competitors to be forgotten.

Again, Nike is looking to the everyday influencers to spread the word about this initiative (obviously in combination with traditional marketing and advertising), but it's got the masses talking and running, and reminded us that it's still here as a brand to be reckoned with.

Carling Black Label: Be the coach

We all know how frustrating it is to support our regional and national teams when they're consistently putting on such poor performance. Carling Black Label tapped into the nation's consciousness when it ran its "[Be the Coach](#)" campaign.

The success of a campaign is largely based on how well you know your audience and Carling took it to another level. It acknowledged our passion as spectators who regularly "armchair-coach" and question the selection and replacement of players during games and the strategies implemented by the coaches.

In July 2011, soccer fans finally felt as though someone heard their pleas of how poor player selection leads to the impending loss of their favourite teams. The solution came from the least expected place: a beer brand, rather than a football association or soccer team.

Carling Black Label gave soccer fans an opportunity to play the role of coach, where fans could SMS the shirt number of players they wanted to substitute. As the game reached the 60th minute, the players with the most votes went off the field and were replaced with crowd favourites. It definitely beat screaming at the TV and was much better than just booing from the grandstand.

For the first time, soccer fans felt in control of their beloved sport and Carling Black Label had made it possible. Through this unconventional initiative, the brand showed its fans that it was putting their needs and desires first.

When those fans get together for a braai and reminisce over the 2011 soccer season, whose name do you think comes up repeatedly - SAFA or Black Label?

The shift

This shift from mass marketing to targeting niche communities and creating or inspiring movements is seeing these brands increasing their customer loyalty and generating positive conversations both on and offline. Absolut, Nike and Carling Black Label are just a few of the brands that I think are removing themselves from the equation and enabling people to connect with what they love. Or the idea of being part of something bigger rather than just another brand activation.

The influencers I follow associate themselves with change, as opposed to following what the masses are doing. The Nike Run Jozi campaign is taking the lead in conversations at the moment and seeing that the 21st is tomorrow - it might just clinch the title. What other brands do you think are building movements and causes of common interest behind their offering?

Oh, and if you happen to see Reeboks or Spaldings anywhere, please take a picture for me?

ABOUT MONGEZI MTATI

Mongezi Mati founded WordStart to help companies generate buzz around their products and services among South African influencers. He is passionate about helping brands to connect the dots from social media, digital data and human interactions outside the web. Mati is also digital analyst, a speaker and a contributor on some of South Africa's leading platforms.

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