

How do you connect in the knowledge-based era?

 By [Emily Stander](#)

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From the perspective of the modern era, brands need to understand how to connect with their customers in order to build trust and loyalty. The evolution of brand communication has seen a lot of forms in the past decade - recently though, brands have been speaking out about social injustice, specifically putting their efforts into expressing what it is they stand for.



This comes out of movements like #BlackLivesMatter and customers demanding to know where brands stand on important social issues. Khumo Theko is a trend analyst, trend spotter, and the founder of I See Africa. Currently, Theko is the digital trends analyst for Draftline Digital Agency, the digital agency for Ab InBev, which encompasses analysis, forecasting and social listening via data and insights for consumer-centric brand optimisation.

For her presentation in #BizTrends2022, hosted by Bizcommunity on 2 February 2022, Theko focused on a brand connection in the knowledge-based era. Now, Theko says, we need to have a conversation about what this means for brand building. How do brands continue to build authentic human connections with their consumers?

Keeping brands connected

There are two spaces we need to keep in mind; how brands continue to engage with consumers in a natural way, and how organisations are able to bypass infrastructure limitations.

From a brand connection perspective, we see brands tapping into pop culture. “Cultural moments and cultural points are quite permeal in terms of how your consumers are engaging online”, Theko said. TikTok is a great example of this, where it is also non-generational - anyone can engage with your brand.

Theko continued, “Brands need to get a little more intentional about keeping track of how your consumers are speaking online - what are they talking about? And how can your brand actually tap into this?”

Engaging with consumers

In terms of engagement, brands need to play in a space where the content mirrors reality.

For example, we see the collaboration between Lizzo and Dove. This partnership, according to Dove, was meant to break beauty barriers and perpetuate a healthy conversation about body positivity. Lizzo has been extremely active in this conversation, and as such, makes for a perfect kind of spokesperson for these issues.

From a brand perspective, this is an example that speaks to considering aspects that highlight the realities and challenges that real people face on a daily basis - making it relatable to the consumer.

Screen-free engagement

It is a well-known fact that people are struggling with screen fatigue. This has been particularly bad since the start of the pandemic, where most people have been working from home consistently.

Brands need to start thinking about how they can tap into the daily routine of consumers by playing around with their full senses.

For example, Campbell created a package that has a scannable QR code, and people are able to get a playlist going from this code while they are cooking. “What you’re essentially doing as a brand, is that you understand the occasions in which your product appears in,” Theko said.

Digital personalisation

How do you reach pain points and consumer needs while still creating something that is whimsical and fun? How can you provide better engagement with your consumers?

These are important questions to ask today, where brands are being challenged to stretch out beyond the barriers and limitations of the internet and e-commerce.

The idea is not having to punt out heavy content or send out a personalised email. Flying Fish created limited-edition sneakers that you were able to customise. Here, as a brand, they were building up their consumer data, asking the right questions, and finding out the nuanced situations in which they exist. All while engaging with them, and making the process fun.

Another example of how we can use data effectively is through the use of Super Apps.

As much as there is a mobile economy, mobile phones don't have that much storage. So, the question is, how do we surpass this, considering data and storage concerns? Super Apps.

A Super App is essentially a platform that can do many things, instead of the need to download multiple apps to do different things. E-hailing platforms are a good example of this kind of thing to do perform many functions - transport, food, banking - and how data can be collected from their consumers. Super Apps are also growing in Africa, bypassing the infrastructure and internet limitations, as well as the limited space on phones in some countries on the continent.

This means you are giving yourself the opportunity to let your data guide you effectively, and allowing your consumers to address their pain points.

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In the end

Consumers are looking for more personalised and meaningful engagement from brands. Brands that take a stand, have a good story to tell, have an honest story to tell, are the brands that are likely to succeed in the long run - in terms of customer loyalty and support.

Understand your consumer, and you understand how to make the best of this modern take on how to do branding right.

Khumo Theko is digital and cultural trend analyst and trend spotter joining the dots of Africa-based trend insights via her content hub I See Africa.

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Freelancer specialising in games and entertainment | My first loves are writing, music and video games

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