

The power and risk of the unofficial collaboration trend

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The rapid success of the Unofficial Bridgerton Musical highlights the potential for brands to harness the power of unofficial collaborations but also the risk.



Source © Play Bill [PayBill](#) The success of the Unofficial Bridgerton Musical highlights the potential - and the risk - for brands to harness the power of informal collaborations

The 'Unofficial Bridgerton Musical' by Barlow and Bear, scooped best musical theatre album at the 2022 Grammy Awards and was the first Grammy winner to be developed on TikTok.

The Netflix inspired musical album started as a TikTok trend in 2021, with creators writing and performing original songs inspired by the series. In trending, it quickly gained steam, with more and more creators contributing their own songs and performances.

Eventually, a group of creators decided to take things a step further and turn the collection of songs into a fully-fledged musical, which they performed on a virtual stage.

Despite being sued by Netflix in July 2022, which was later settled in September, this unofficial collaboration creative concept was refreshing for a flagging consumer world as the pandemic drew on and on.

While the musical was created without the involvement or endorsement of Netflix or the Bridgerton creators, it still generated significant buzz and attract a dedicated following – albeit they ended up being sued.

But the winning strategy here was the boldness in how collaborators offered a novel brand experience space in which they tapped into the creativity and passion of their fans – and built deeper connections with their communities.

This approach could certainly lead to increased brand loyalty as well as deliver valuable insights and feedback.

What is unofficial collaboration?

Setting new paces with change, Africa's brands and people have been part of building the momentum behind an increasingly dominant trend called unofficial collaboration.

The questions is why, and what is unofficial collaboration?

Broadly speaking, an unofficial collaboration refers to an informal partnership between two or more brands (or their leaders) that work together to achieve a common goal, without any formal agreement.

It's the 'ultimate handshake deal', and takes various forms, such as the basics of co-creating content, cross-promotion of ideas, or the joint product launches.

At its most powerful is the impact of like-minded voices behind issues that matter and have systemic societal and economic impact.

Critically, what matters for agencies, is that it is the singular most powerful tool they have in their arsenals – the ability to connect people, voices and events together to create greater earned impact and real, powerful conversations.

Africa leveraging brand partnerships

But what matters now, is that this has implications for strategic communications and the brands and companies they represent across our continent.

Most notably, brands born on our continent and committed to being true to how they represent being African, can powerfully leverage unique brand partnerships to reach new audiences.

Consider the effect delivered by Nigerian fashion brand, Maki Oh as it partnered with American luxury fashion brand, Pyer Moss, to create a limited edition capsule collection tailored to a more youthful audience.

Then there was the centre stage move of South African singer, Mthandazo Gatya, who participated in the John Legend #OpenVerseChallenge on TikTok. His talented and leading step up resulted in him sharing the stage with musician John Legend during his South Africa Tour.

Approach with caution

For African brands, values such as sustainability and ethical practices are exceptionally important to consumers.

On this front, it is worth pausing for a creative cuppa with South African tea company, Yswara.

The brand collaborated with Soko, the Kenyan luxury brand to create a limited edition tea set. This allowed both brands to convey their shared values of sustainability and ethical sourcing in an elegant and true-to-brand move.

However, businesses must approach unofficial collaboration with caution. Without a formal agreement, it can be challenging to manage expectations and ensure that both parties are meeting their objectives.

Additionally, there is the risk of diluting each brand's identity and message if the collaboration is not executed properly.

Brands also need to be careful not to infringe on any intellectual property rights and should always ensure that any collaborations align with their brand values and messaging.

Importantly too, brands should be prepared to handle any potential backlash or negative attention that may arise from supporting or promoting unofficial collaborations.

A compelling opportunity

But despite these notes of caution, the rise of the unofficial collaboration presents a compelling opportunity for brands to engage with audiences in new and exciting ways.

By embracing the passion of their fans, companies can create meaningful connections that can help drive success in the long run.

Indeed, it is a lesson companies and CEOs can learn from successful brand collaborations.

It is about unlocking the power of like-mindedness and true commitment to drive impact on key issues and causes that matter beyond just the needs of the organisation itself.

Issues such as regulatory overreach, investments in communities and policy all are bigger than the self. It's unlikely that just the "self" can solve them alone.

By leveraging each other's strengths and values, African companies can create relevant business experiences when both parties' objectives are aligned around the desired results.

Even more so, as businesses navigate how to merge entertainment and education as underlying brand experiences, we can expect to see many more of our brands choosing the path of the unofficial collaboration.

It is this that will unlock the future value of agency client partnerships. The connecting of the dots in unexpected and strategic ways to create measurable impact from the work we do and is the future of the most powerful conversations we can help our clients have.

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