

# Social media marketing and the multicultural audience



Bylan Henderson

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Our increasing reliance on digital media has eradicated geographical boundaries, allowing millions of people to communicate, share ideas and access a wealth of information we'd never been privy to have had it not been for the explosion of the internet into the mainstream.

As brands embrace the online space with more fervour than ever before, an explosion of social media marketing has erupted - with both negative and positive consequences for all involved.

Social media marketing is a powerful tool, enabling you to broadcast your message to a specific audience in an instant.

The ease at which a brand can commandeer a (digital) space and broadcast their message comes with responsibilities of its own, however. Instead of running a print advertisement in your local newsletter, you're now able to take to Twitter - a platform that's free to use and has a wider reach. Unfortunately, what many brands fail to recognise, is the fact that their audience is now a global one, which means that every single thing you post, tweet, share or upload has to be carefully curated in order to avoid offending. Since Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, *et al* consist of users from around the world, your message has to be globalised. In other words, safe for consumption.



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One wrong move on social media, and your brand risks facing the wrath of millions.

BIC's Women's Day *faux pas* - which saw the brand inadvertently imply that women are inferior to men - demonstrated that one wrong post can go viral in a matter of seconds, destroying any brand equity you've painstakingly built over years, or even decades. Thanks to the ease at which we can digitally communicate, we're all armchair activists (also known as slacktivists) - and while this can do a lot of good in bringing attention to serious causes (remember Cecil the lion?), it also means that we're that much quicker to complain or point out any offensive or contentious material.

The equivalent of a digital herd mentality has seen beloved brands suffer at the hands of disgruntled and offended audiences - regardless of whether their gaffe was intentional or not.

Approach social media marketing as you would when crossing the road - with care.

If in doubt, don't post. Whitney-Boggs, author of *How to use Social Media to Target Multicultural Audiences* advises that brands avoid generalisations and stereotypes (this may sound obvious, but brands are guilty of this time and time again). Besides making sure that all of your content is suitable for an international audience, make sure that you've got access to a localisation service, who'll advise you on product messaging that won't offend or be misconstrued or misunderstood.

Often, a (seemingly) harmless phrase or picture is in fact incredibly offensive or nonsensical when received by a portion of your audience. An in-depth understanding of the culture of your target market is the difference between a marketing campaign that soars, and one that falls flat.

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## ABOUT IAN HENDERSON

Ian Henderson is the chief technology officer and founder of Rubric South Africa (<http://www.rubric.com/za>). Twitter: @rubricinc

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