

Where is digital marketing heading for SA retailers in 2022?

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2021 was an interesting year for marketing, as more businesses - big and small - turned to digital to reach new audiences and navigate a new normal where digital media consumption increased. Retailers, specifically, were required to adapt and prioritise their digital strategies to avoid falling behind in an extremely competitive and fast-moving environment.



Source: www.unsplash.com

This year, we expect to see the world of digital marketing expand and grow to new heights, as this channel continues to cement itself as critical to the success of any brand or business.

These are my predictions for five important digital marketing trends for South African retailers to watch out for in 2022:

The rise and rise of the hybrid digital marketing team

In the past, many businesses have taken one of two approaches to their digital marketing – an in-house team or outsourced to an agency. Both of these approaches have their unique challenges.

In-house marketing teams can be expensive and creativity can sometimes be stifled. The reality of working with an agency

is that your resources are shared, and the knowledge of your specific business and industry can take time to come about.

This year, I expect to see the rise of the hybrid approach more deliberately, which will see South African businesses having an individual or small team who work directly with the agency to drive their digital marketing strategy. I believe this approach presents the ideal set-up to foster the right balance of creativity, affordability, and understanding of the complexities of the business and industry in question.



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The hybrid model is powerful for retail, where deadlines are often immediate. In-house teams are able to deliver on these swiftly and effectively where changes are needed, under the creative guidance of the agency.

The omnichannel customer experience

‘Omnichannel’ has been a buzzword for a couple of years now when it comes to customer experience, but has not necessarily come to full fruition locally yet through channels like digital marketing.

More SA businesses will prioritise using their customer data to create a single view of their customer that allows them to market to them in the best possible way – as digital marketing continues to establish itself as a critical part of the consumer path to purchase. In retail, for example, those brands who are not aware of how their in-store customer behaves on digital channels, or vice versa, run the risk of losing market share and customer loyalty almost overnight.

Great marketing provides the customer with an experience that feels personal and seamless – and this is what omnichannel means.

The TikTok Trend

2021 saw the rise and rise of TikTok as a platform, and it continues to expand, grow and evolve – making it challenging for brands to figure out how to establish their presence on the platform. I believe that most local brands haven’t yet figured out how to do this in the right way yet – but that is set to change this year.

Content is king on this platform and needs to feel native to the platform and original and entertaining to audiences, while still communicating brand messaging effectively – this can be a hard balance to strike. I believe more brands will be strategising around the best ways to use the platform – be it through influencers or a brand presence – and prioritising their investment in this regard.

In the retail world, content and influencer work most needs to champion a product rather than a brand itself. It can often be challenging to find the balance between what is genuine to the creator and creating talkability and excitement about a product. This year, retailers will need to work alongside content creators to create unique and innovative ways to do this.

Monetising digital efforts

In South Africa specifically, many brands are still using their digital channels for brand awareness and have not yet figured out how to monetise and track the success of their digital approach. For any business that is serious about succeeding in the digital age, this is going to have to change this year.

Businesses need to be aware of how their efforts on social media. Google, for example, are contributing toward their overall presence and ultimately, sales. Digital marketers need to be tracking the entire customer journey and have a detailed

understanding of how each individual channel is contributing to e-commerce conversions. This is pivotal in ensuring digital marketing investment is geared towards achieving optimum results.



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Another important aspect of this is influencer relations and looking at new ways to track and monetise these brand relationships without it being to the detriment of originality.

For retail brands with a diverse range of products, it is important to understand which channels work best for which categories – a one-size-fits-all approach is not going to cut it in 2022. Each platform has a unique audience profile, and retailers need to ensure their spending aligns to the right categories and products, for best results.

The growing utilisation of dark social channels

Lastly, it is important that brands and businesses are paying attention to those channels where the user journey is encrypted – such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. There is certainly a growing trend locally where brands are investing in the creation of WhatsApp chatbots, but these are being used as customer experience channels rather than a platform for marketing and community building.

This year, I expect that will change, as brands look for new and innovative ways to reach their audiences.



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In conclusion, customer-centricity is king in 2022 – and digital marketing is driving this in many ways. For retailers, it is essential to have synchronicity between marketing, products, supply chain and e-commerce or brick and mortar stores in order to ensure customers are presented with the products, services and experiences they desire and expect.

While it is certainly important that brands and businesses are keeping up to date with the latest trends, it is important to realise that there will always be a new trend on the rise. Rather than trying to keep up with all of these, or making assumptions about what consumers might want, businesses need to critically interrogate which of these are most aligned to the needs and wants of their customers and use that to create and drive their strategies for 2022 and beyond.

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