

Cellphone penetration positions it for marketing success

By: Eddie Groenewald

Cellphone penetration into the South African market and the advancement of mobile marketing means the cellphone will soon compete with traditional media head-on. The days of colourless cellphones screens with no graphics and tiny squeaky speakers are but a distant memory to most of us. We now carry devices with full multimedia functionality, stereo sound and high-speed connectivity to the Internet.



Furthermore, these devices have penetrated the market more effectively than any other medium. It's hard to say how many South African's carry a cellphone, but the three cellphone networks together total a combined base of over 36 million active SIM cards in 2007.

Comparing that to radio, TV and Internet stats, cellphones are now the dominant communications device in the market. The South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) says in its AMPS (All Media and Products Survey) 2006 survey that there are around 28.5 million radio listeners and around 24.5 million TV adult viewers*. In addition, the ratio of cellphone users compared to Internet users and landlines is around 5:1.

Similar global trend

The trend globally is similar. Cellphones are in the majority with 2.5 billion active cellphones, compared to an estimated 900 million Internet users and a billion television sets.

And to add even more weight to these figures, most people's cellphones remain within two metres of them for the majority of the day, while TVs, radios and even the Internet are sampled sporadically.

Within this context, add the fact that we live instant lives. When I want to know something, I want to know it now. Not in five minutes time, now when I get to the office. Now.

Let's take a scenario or two: Bob is at his daughter's birthday party and there is no TV in sight, no radio to listen to and he certainly wasn't allowed to bring his laptop along. But the Springboks are playing their opening game against Samoa in the World Cup and he wants to know the score. If he could get the score off a .mobi site throughout the game, that would be great. Better yet, he'd like updates sent to him as the game progressed.

Jenny's sitting at a coffee shop with a friend, Liz, chatting about how she's going to surprise her husband for her anniversary. Liz remembers a great restaurant but can't remember where it is exactly or what the telephone number is. TV or radio won't help; neither will the newspaper at the front of the coffee shop. A cellphone will, particularly since this new restaurant has its own .mobi site with menu and contact details.

Harnessing the power of mobile

As a consumer you're already nervous when hearing words like "harnessing". What am I going to get next on my phone? Searching for information like Bob or Jenny is one thing, having it sent to you is quite another.

At the same time, the cellphone has the power to deliver really worthwhile information to you, the consumer. For example, a retail store sends you a MMS with its latest specials and an extra 15% off your total bill if you present the MMS at the cashier.

Now who's going to complain about that? Or you're about to be eligible to upgrade your cellphone contract and your service provider sends you an MMS with a barcode saying if you take it in and upgrade your contract, you'll get a free Bluetooth headset.

Therefore communicating to consumers via their cellphones in a way that benefits them not only builds trust between consumers and companies but provides a mutually beneficial interaction.

Put together in days

And while the process of building a campaign to communicate with customers via the TV, radio or Internet can take weeks to months, a well-thought-out mobile campaign can be put together in days.

But it's about being creative and capturing the consumers' attention and most importantly adding value.

*Importantly, these figures represent people who watched TV or listened to the radio once in the space of a week.

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