

# The youth want brands that listen to them

 By Louise Marsland

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The millennial generation expects a lot from brands. They expect them to behave as they do: communicating in real time, being transparent about all aspects of the brand journey and values, and developing as fast as the technology that is part of the millennial's life.



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George Bourdos has been a partner in VBN Consultants for the past four years and heads up the Future Business Division at VBN Consultants. VBN aims to offer a refreshing perspective on consumer insights and market trend reviews. With a particular focus on millennials, Bourdos told *Bizcommunity.com* what some of the most significant trends are that are impacting brands.

## ■ What is the biggest trend impacting on youth marketing today?

Probably technology and what it allows social media to do, but it is entrenched in the youth market. They basically can't live without their smartphones. Studies even show they suffer separation anxiety without their phones. Technology has enabled consumers to become more visual consumers, as the biggest content is mainly video. More so on the visual side is the use of emojis. The younger market communicates almost altogether with emojis. Gone is the shorthand of the 90s, it's all about visual communication.

## ■ Which generation is having the biggest impact currently on marketing strategy?

The youth market in general - all the way from youngsters to tweens, teenagers, those in their 20s - is even closer to their parents than any other generation. They all influence what their parents buy, eat, what tech they buy, they influence them with online shopping. The youth market in general are the drivers of change. With them driving it, they expect brands to engage more with them: they are expecting more dialogue from brands and expecting them to be more transparent and real.

## ■ How have millennials fundamentally changed brand marketing?

They are the digital adopters who have grown up with first generation of cellphones, dial up internet, and we have adapted with the technology. The biggest change is with brands - they are expecting brands to adapt as fast as technology. They

expect brands to change communication – to behave like they do. If they are on Snapchat, they want their brands to communicate with them there and respond as quickly as their friends do on Snapchat.

## ■ How are you preparing for Generation Z?

The next big focus for us will be Generation Z. Millennials are over-talked about. People are underestimating Gen Z. They are true digital natives, they have embraced it more than any other generation. They are channel agnostic. They are on everything. They are a lot more sceptical. They want complete brand transparency. And they are less fazed by fancy more good-looking models and perfect image. They are more authentic and care more about personal image and style. It is more about whether brands reflect their personal brand. They will challenge every single marketing director at every single brand.

## ■ What do you believe is the next disruptor in youth marketing?

I think it's going to be something about technology and the experience that technology enables. They will disrupt, but the technology will enable the disruption. Let's say it's a shoe brand: selling shoes isn't good enough. The same goes for the rest of the industry. There will be a big merge between offline and online. They still want the human experience of in store, but delivered by the time they are home. A seamless experience. We can expect the unexpected. Brands are realising that the demand of the future consumer means you have to continuously innovate.

## ■ What are the pillars of a successful youth marketing strategy?

1. Stay true to your brand. What does your brand stand for, the essence.
2. Embrace new technology if there is a viable opportunity. Don't be scared to go offline.
3. Stay relevant and be authentic. Consumers can see through a brand trying to be something it is not.
4. It is vital to have a deep dialogue with the consumer. The consumer wants a brand that listens to them. They want to feel they are heard. They want to feel that the brand is listening to their feedback. That is vital. Make sure you are.

## ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

Louise Burgers (previously Marsland) is Founder/Content Director: SOURCE Content Marketing Agency. Louise is a Writer, Publisher, Editor, Content Strategist, Content/Media Trainer. She has written about consumer trends, brands, branding, media, marketing and the advertising communications industry in SA and across Africa, for over 20 years, notably, as previous Africa Editor: Bizcommunity.com; Editor: Bizcommunity Media/Marketing SA; Editor-in-Chief: AdVantage magazine; Editor: Marketing Mx magazine; Editor: Progressive Retailing magazine; Editor: BusinessBrief magazine; Editor: FMOG Files newsletter. Web: [www.sourceagency.co.za](http://www.sourceagency.co.za).

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