

EDITORIAL: ICT

Socially proactive

Quick and sticky, on-line communications reaches people 'as it happens' says practitioner and PR Catherine Lückhoff. Nancy Richards finds out more about the power of social media.



The hype around social media makes it seem elitist, exclusionary, which is the reverse of what it's supposed to be.' Catherine Lückhoff owner of MANGO-OMC is refreshingly straight-talking. Her belief around the relatively recent communication system that has exploded into the ether is that 'it's not new, just different. The principles of reaching and interacting with people are just the same as they've always been.'

But you do have to know how to use it. Catherine's knowledge has been proved in the successful promotion and branding of Rocking The Daisies, the music festival at Cloof Winery in Darling. In 2006 the

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event attracted 1 300; a year later, after her company had come on board, it rose to 5 000; and in 2009 around 10 500 festival goers turned up.

'It's true that the growth was also to do with word of mouth, but a lot of that was being passed on through Facebook. In effect, our strategy was to work with what was already happening on those group and

events pages. We linked in and offered free tickets and "shwag" bags to the Facebook groups who got together the most people with the most confirmed signed-up members. And it's immediate, within 24 hours we could give updates on which new bands were in the line up, how many thousand tickets were left, almost like an online PA system. We also created an official Rocking the Daisies website including a press room for accredited Media to access detailed information.'

The beauty of it, she explains, is that it's a 'sticky' concept; once you've joined the online community, you work together. 'They aggregate themselves, put up their own videos on YouTube, start and continue the conversations – as a system it self-motivates and self-regulates.' The job of the communications company is then to track, stimulate and be part of it. Developing the strategy is exciting, costing it out is harder.

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Another client campaign to benefit from social media was the Foschini 16 Days of Activism against domestic violence. Bloggers were invited to put supportive badges onto their sites. The extraordinary spin-off was that a number of bloggers then posted their own stories of abuse, highlighting a notable aspect of online communication: that it is often an easier space in which to share than face to face. 'Women are said to be better at it, and as a community, it's hugely supportive, but the authenticity angle is crucial for both genders. Someone, or something that lacks credibility, will quickly be "unfollowed" or "unfriended" on Twitter or Facebook.'

However Catherine is emphatic that it is just another 'comms tool', ideal to reach a pinpointed target market, but 'you wouldn't use it say for a chamber music audience, yet.' Things are changing fast, she concedes (her own father is on Facebook), though perhaps not fast enough across all cultures. And although she embraces social media with a tangible passion, Catherine sees it as a partner with traditional offline methods and says finally, 'I still love the crispy page sound of a brand new print magazine.'

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