

8 key Meltwater take outs and how they should shape digital strategy

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The key to successful marketing is meeting your consumers where they are – and when it comes to South Africans, that means online. According to Meltwater’s highly anticipated annual State of Digital Report, South Africa ranked number one globally for time spent using the internet – a whopping 9 hours and 24 minutes – with a large percentage of that time spent scrolling social media platforms.



“The Meltwater State of Digital Report gives a true high-level global view of the industry using robust data gathered from trusted leading global data partners. The report provides some valuable insights into where your audience is and their behavioural trends, giving you the opportunity to finetune your marketing plans to ensure you are in fact ‘meeting your customers where they are’,” says Cheryl Ingram, founder and managing director of one of South Africa’s leading digital agencies, [The Digital Media Collective \(TDMC\)](#).

Cheryl says there has been a marked change in South Africans’ online behaviour since 2020. “A lot of behaviours have changed dramatically off the back of the Covid-19 pandemic, and this comes through in the data. There’s been a big shift in how people use the internet to do their jobs, plus there has been widescale adoption of online learning – it is almost like people are online all day, every day. The commoditisation of data and the drop in data costs has dramatically shifted access to the internet – and it is reflected in the report, with South Africa taking top spot for the number of hours spent online,” says Cheryl.

Here Cheryl shares her expertise, unpacking other key take outs from the Meltwater report and how businesses can reach and convert potential customers online.

1. Create a seamless mobile experience

South Africa ranked third globally for using mobile phones to access the web – and as a result, mobile traffic now accounts

for 82% of all web traffic in South Africa.

“Simply put, if you aren’t creating seamless mobile access to your website, and instilling confidence in your consumer once they get there by creating a frictionless customer journey, you are leaving a lot of money on the table,” says Cheryl. “Every page must be optimised for mobile – customers don’t want to be scrolling from left to right to access information. It must be easy to navigate, fast and intuitive. Consumers have high expectations – and can quickly lose patience – so if they are battling to make sense of your site they will leave and find someone else who does it better.”

2. Prioritise your Google presence

South Africa ranked number one in the world for percentage of internet users aged 16-64 who use search engines every month. “So many brands make the mistake of thinking that they only need to be on social media, and they forego Google,” says Cheryl. “But this is a mistake that can cost your business dearly. Think of the shopper journey: if you are looking for something, you Google it. More often than not, Google is where the customer goes first, if not to make an immediate purchase, then certainly to research their options.

“And if you are not actively spending on Google with a paid media campaign, in the very least ensure you have a well-optimised Google Business listing that is actively managed – I am always surprised by how many businesses don’t have these basics ticked off.”

3. Leverage video to connect with your audience

South Africa sits in the top three for the percentage of internet users who watch any form of video online each week, and as Cheryl points out, utilising video can be a very useful tool for prospecting new customers.

“Video has become a big part of the consumer journey and offers a great way for brands to connect with their audience, especially if they can deliver content in a way that entertains and engages the audience. Video is perfect for telling your brand story and building engagement beyond your immediate customer base. Every brand should be thinking about how they can leverage this opportunity,” says Cheryl.

4. Don’t underestimate the South African audience

“South Africa took the second spot for percentage of internet users who use a banking, insurance or investment app each month, which shows us that South Africans are actually very tech savvy,” says Cheryl. While the country might have a very diverse developing nation population, the population’s online behaviours are very first-world. “Smartphone penetration is well above 90% in South Africa now and internet penetration is sitting at around 70%. Suffice to say, South African customers are switched on.”

5. Polish your social media advertising strategy

Don’t believe the talk that audiences are moving away from social, especially in South Africa, where we took the number two spot globally for time spent on social media platforms, clocking up an eye-popping 3hrs 41 minutes every day.

“Brands need to be very clear on who their audience is, what type of content they want, and meet them where they are at. If you compare the local numbers for Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, Facebook remains way ahead of the pack – we’re talking 30 million+ users every month actively engaging with the platform. TikTok doesn’t disclose their numbers, but Instagram trails way behind with an audience of only around 10 million,” says Cheryl.

A common mistake brands make is trying to be all things to all platforms. “Don’t spread yourself too thin, rather pick the relevant platform for your audience and do it well. Leverage the strength of the platform to bring consumers (new and old) into your world, rather than making the platform itself the be all and end all of your business,” warns Cheryl.

6. Maximise discovery potential of social media platforms

South Africa ranked second in the world for the percentage of users who use social media to learn more about brands and seek out their content. “This is particularly relevant for Gen Z, where we see TikTok fast becoming a discovery channel that is used as a search engine,” says Cheryl.

7. Incorporate creators into your marketing strat

Influencer endorsement holds great value for brands in South Africa, with the country placing in the top five for the percentage of internet users who follow influencers or other experts on social media. “Increasingly consumers are starting to put greater stead in the word of a content creator or influencer with regards to a brand rather than the brand itself,” says Cheryl. “We have become blind to ads and are much more greatly influenced by referrals – after all social media is a peer-to-peer platform. However, when brands engage content creators, they need to ensure there is an authentic connection to both the brand and their audience, otherwise the content falls flat.”

The Consumer Insights: Retail report says consumers seek out and are most influenced by insights from peers, tailored recommendations, and unprompted praise. It also emphasises the power of appearing on “Best Of” lists and encourages marketers to connect with outlets that regularly recommend products.

8. Audit your loyalty-building priorities

Both the State of Digital Report and the Consumer Insights: Retail report highlight some interesting numbers around the factors influencing online purchases. “Whilst retailers are scrambling to implement loyalty programmes, the top three factors influencing a consumers’ online purchase across all age categories are free delivery, discounts and an easy returns process,” says Cheryl. “So, before implementing an over complicated and layered loyalty programme, online retailers should make sure they have the top three influencing factors covered.”

All in all, the Meltwater State of Digital Report tells a positive story about the state of digital in South Africa and how we benchmark against the rest of the world. “By utilising these robust, data-driven insights to build their strategies, businesses can connect meaningfully with their customers, increase conversion, and strengthen their bottom line,” says Cheryl.

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