

Telephone, Twitter, telling-woman - which one is the fastest?

 By [Bonnie Ramaila](#)

25 Oct 2013

I remember my mother used to tell us anecdotes of her school years and said she used to have a teacher called "Meneer" (that's how students used to address their teachers in the 1940' & 50's), who used to say, "Between a telephone, a telegram and a telling woman, the fastest is a telling-woman" - when he used to reprimand students for tittle-tattle at the girls school.

Obviously in those days the two (telephone and telegram) were the means of communication.



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Most effective form of communication

This brings me to my point of what I think is the most neglected, powerful means of communication we now overlook due to the advent of digital age, *Word of Mouth*, which we used to abbreviate as WoM. Lately I have been wondering how do media strategies and plans look like, especially for the FMCG products targeted at rural and peri-urban areas. Do they still include WoM as one of the means of communication, especially when promotions are scheduled at the various places like malls or shopping centres of those particular areas?

Three years ago, I was working with a client who wanted to launch a new washing powder targeted at the lower LSM's. Upon presenting the strategy and the whole plan for marketing and communication, the only thing that worried him was the WoM, which I had included in the plan.

We argued until we were navy blue in the face, and I finally won the argument (well, he let me win it!) - when I convinced him to test 'my old fashioned theory' like he sarcastically said. Trying hard to drive a point home and put my theory to test, I subsequently called a close cousin who lives in the peri-urban area of Limpopo, whom I asked to tell a few friends around her neighbourhood, to come to her house for a new soap demonstration on Saturday.

Overlooking WoM

The Saturday of the demonstration came, her home was packed to the rafters the entire morning, we even had to move the venue to a local shopping centre next to a taxi rank - and you can imagine the traffic! Now, tell me if word of mouth is not effective, I said to the client, neither print advert, TV nor radio advert!

By default, we actually had the community radio station covering the demonstration that was taking place without us sending any press release or communicating with them, due to word of mouth. Needless to mention that I left him speechless.

I often feel that since the advent of social media, this means of communication has been grossly overlooked and probably never gets to find its way into the media strategies and schedules of agencies, through my observation of the communication and advertising landscape. In my example above, I have demonstrated that a 'telling-woman' - is the fastest mode of communication - whether it's rural, peri-urban or urban.

To further illustrate this WoM point, on a more personal note and a different one, when the news of my sister's passing away two months ago hit our home, it was a Thursday night. In the morning, my mom told a neighbour - who often checks on my family every morning before 8am. By 12pm, we had the entire neighbours coming to our house to pay their respects - and they came in droves.

This is in Soweto. We had not yet informed some of our relatives or communicated the news on facebook, or tweeted, or

even placed the funeral notice in the newspapers, the whole area knew. You might say news like these are different, yes they are, but think about it, how else do people get to know about anything else that quickly? 'telling-woman'! Okay, men do tell as well.

Faster than social media

That's the power of a 'telling-woman', faster than the social media. WoM might vary and depend upon the product or service you're selling or communicating. It might not be suitable for some services or products, but when you have the opportunity to utilise it, do not forget this means of communication - use it, the client will love you when they realise its effectiveness. It's the fastest, effortless and equally effective.

Forget the Twitter, 'telling-woman' is the future and here to stay.

Please note that I am using the term 'telling woman' - as a substitute to WoM as explained by the anecdote I shared above. I am by no means belittling women or suggesting anything improper about women.

ABOUT BONNIE RAMAILA

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