



Africa Dispatches: Get social with Sheena Kretzmer [interview]

🕒 5 FEB 2018

💬 1

by Charlie Mathews (@CharlesLeeZA) If you work in social media, it's unlikely you won't know Sheena Kretzmer (née Gates) (@SheBeeGee). A writer who gained respect as a blogging pioneer, her ability to capture attention catapulted her into the world of social marketing well before most agencies considered the emerging media viable.

After working at a handful of hot agencies, Kretzmer founded [The Social Local](#), a strategic social media consultancy that has done work for the kind of brands everyone wants in their portfolio. Which? Accenture, Google, Pick n Pay, MTN, Unilever, Land Rover, Ford, Mazda, Tsogo Sun and more. Kretzmer opens up to Africa Dispatches about the early days, philosophy, how crowded social media marketing's become and her favourite campaign.

Africa Dispatches: How did it all start?

Sheena Kretzmer: In the early days of social media, I had a popular blog which lead me to engaging on Twitter and Facebook. The landscape was much-smaller back then in 2005, so the few of us [who] were the earlier adopters had a beautiful community going. I launched an online magazine called NerdMag and initiated an annual social media auction and awards programme called The Nerdies, which gained a bit of media attention. Through that I was approached by a few agencies to assist with their digital initiative. I landed up at Aqua, one of Africa's largest digital agencies, now owned by Wunderman. Back, then we didn't even have titles in social media so I remember the previous CEO, Brent S.



and me, proverbially throwing titles into a hat to see what would work. The titles changed often until, almost by accident, I became what is now known as a social media specialist and then eventually head of social media.

AD: Who are you?

SK: I'm an ex-blogger who fell in love with social media over 10 years ago, and somehow managed to turn a passion into a career. After many years in both agency and then corporate, I now own and manage a strategic social media consultancy called [The Social Local](#). We specialise in empowering our clients to take their social media work in-house. In recent years, I've also tacked on the title of "Wife" to my lovely husband, Jon, and "Mom" to my delightfully naughty son, Aiden.

AD: What have been the biggest lessons learned?

SK: My biggest lesson, particularly in South Africa, has been to vet content for potential crisis communications, no matter how innocuous it might seem. South Africans have embraced social media; however, it also means they've embraced having their own soapbox to attack brands with. Nobody is immune.

Another big lesson is that, as social media professionals, it is not only our job but our duty, to stand up for what is right, and to follow best practice when it comes to social media. This requires lots of preparation and stamina so that we don't always take the easy way out by listening to what our clients *want* instead of helping them figure out what they *need*.

AD: How has the industry changed since you first started?

SK: So much has changed! For one thing, mainstream media has embraced social media to its fullest. Radios, newspapers and TV have started getting comfortable with how social media can aid them, rather than compete. Brands and companies, ranging from small to enterprise, have realised just how imperative social media is to their end line and reputation. Social media professionals have started to realise that we need some formal training and that we can't all be mavericks, chasing after the biggest fan following; a strategy must be the first step in building a social media presence.

AD: What's your philosophy when it comes to social? Do you have a particular approach or philosophy?

SK: I have several but the first, and most important, is to be honest and transparent with your clients. There's no point in hiding how you do things from your client in the hopes of retaining their business. Too many peers of mine do this and lose clients anyway. I find empowering my clients to understand what is done, and why, is the most important factor in my business. The more they understand a skill or tactic, the more they prioritise social media in their business.

AD: What's more important — reach or engagement, and why?

SK: As much as the more popular answer is "engagement", that can't happen without "reach", right? So ,my answer is always "reach first, then just as importantly, engagement".

AD: Complete the sentence. "Content "

SK: "Content is not king. If I sent you to a desert island and gave you the choice of taking friends or your movies, you'd choose friends. If you chose movies, we'd call you a sociopath. Conversation is king. Content is just something to talk about." — Cory Doctorow, Boing Boing

AD: What's the best strategic advice you could give to a brand who wants to use social media to improve their relationship with their customers?

SK: Have a plan in place for when the shit hits the fan. You think it'll never happen to you but it can and will, w



least expect it, for reasons you never fathomed. Start with an internal social media policy and encourage your staff to understand it and engage in it. Then build a plan to show transparency with your business philosophies, processes and turnaround times. At the end of the day, your fans are human; humans appreciate authenticity. Secondly, ensure you have a policy on how to handle online reputation management — who is responsible for these comment replies, who does it get escalated to, who signs it off. Ensure the turnaround times are within a few hours — social media is all about immediacy and the longer you take to contain the problem, the bigger a problem can become.

AD: What's the best skill/attitude to have to be able to be a smart strategic thinker from a marketing perspective?

SK: It's important to find someone who can think about actual business objectives and how you can realistically achieve them, while simultaneously offering value to your social media audience. Always keep yourself honest on your content being not just important for you but being of interest to your audience too. Nobody likes a page that posts about their awards and accolades but never follows through with offering education, entertainment or value. The biggest skill to apply to strategy is objectivity and realism.

AD: What social marketing buzzword would you ban?

SK: "Social media guru" should be illegalised. Oh, and "Make it viral!", obviously.

AD: Is social marketing overtraded?

SK: Of course, but show me one industry that isn't. The good guys always make it out of the gates and the results speak for themselves. The fly-by-nights don't last long before their true colours show.

AD: What are the opportunities in the social marketing sector?

SK: I often get asked if I'm threatened by other peers consulting in their own right or starting agencies. I really don't understand why people feel we should be threatened by each other. I'm a firm believer that, not only are there enough clients to go around, but that we can all learn from each other and better the industry together. This was the main reason why we started the Social Media & Community Managers support group on Facebook. There are nearly 1600 members all engaging with each other daily and reaching out for support or providing value. To answer your question: the biggest opportunity we should all be striving for is to reach out to each other and share what we learn.

AD: What digital marketing trends can we expect in 2018?

SK: We're already seeing a huge shift to mobile and video content. I think we'll see more of this — live-streaming and VR in 2018. Previously South Africa was the ugly stepchild of video content capabilities but, with bandwidth and fibre upping their games, now everyone has the opportunity of enjoying dynamic content.

AD: What's the best advice anyone's ever given you?

SK: Get a great accountant and don't quote from desperation. It's held true since my business's inception and I'm so glad I followed this advice. Smaller clients who penny pinch are often the most demanding and unrealistic in terms of objectives. I know peers who break their backs trying to keep these clients happy even though they compromise on quality and best practice. At the end of the day, their clients aren't seeing tangible results for their business, and the specialists aren't winning accolades for subpar work.

AD: What's the worst advice anyone's ever given you?

SK: "You should dress up for your male clients so they like you more." Ugh.

AD: Favourite digital campaign ever?

SK: I am absolutely LOVING anything [Amarula does on Facebook](#) these days. They are clearly with a great account and have a good, well rounded team at their social media meetings. The content is dynamic, pushing boundaries and is so delightful to fans. High five to them.



Charles Lee Mathews (@CharlesLeeZA) is the founder of *TheWriters.co.za*, a boutique strategy and content shop that helps brands better connect — and engage with — the people who matter most. When not writing, or thinking about human behaviour, she is a contributing editor to MarkLives.com through her monthly “Africa Dispatches” column.



— **Sign up now** for the MarkLives email newsletter every Monday and Thursday, now including headlines from the **Ramify.biz** company newsroom service!

Share this:

Print | Email | WhatsApp | Telegram | Tweet | Share 120 | LinkedIn Share | Save

Related

Africa Dispatches: Go further out [interview] 16 Mar 2017

Africa Dispatches: Julia Franco’s fashionable brand revolution 25 Apr 2017

Mark: Africa Dispatches focuses on brand building in key African markets 9 Jun 2014



COLUMNS

#AdChamps – Kyle de Waal & Morgan Botha

#AgencyLeaders – Most Admired Poll

#CoronavirusSA – Special Section

#DesignIndaba25 – Festival of Design

An Accountant in Adland – Siwe Lawrence

Big Q – MarkLives Panel

Big Reads on MarkLives

BrandFocus – Sabrina Forbes

Brands & Branding – Affinity Publishing

By Invitation Only – Motive

Campaigns – MarkLives

Circulation Data – ABC Analysis

