# Local brands ignoring the obvious while chasing shiny, new tech

By Johan Walters , issued by Incubeta                                    16 Oct 2023

Technology is helping global retailers reinvent themselves. Offering an exciting blend of cutting edge digital technology and traditional strategies, smart tech is helping retailers attract new customers and, in many instances, also gain valuable user data along the way. But before CMOs can start rolling out some of the exciting new services available, it's vital that they get the basics right first.

South Africa has some of the most savvy marketers, but many still struggle when it comes to the technical side of things. This is especially true when it comes to additive tech like augmented, virtual and mixed reality. On the other hand, there are also those who hear about new technologies and insist on trying it, even if there are no clear objectives. The rush to establish brands in the metaverse was a case in point.

The biggest problem when it comes to using tech in retail is the persistent lack of understanding of just how important mobile strategies are. This cuts them off from one of the biggest differentiators currently available to South African brands: a strong mobile presence.



Johan Walters, lead consultant, Digital Marketing Transformation (SSA)

**It's a mobile world**

In PWC's Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey, the company shares just how much today's consumers rely on their mobile phones in the purchasing funnel.

More than half of surveyed consumers said they "almost always or frequently" rely on mobile devices and apps for pre-purchase research (56%) and reviews (54%).

What's more, 40% of consumers use their phones while shopping in-store to access online product information and comparisons and 36% use them while standing in front of a product to compare the price on a competitor's outlet or website.

The problem with many local retailers (and businesses in general) is that their mobile experience is so slow that they lose many potential customers before they have even begun to research and compare their wares.

**Every second counts, and most brands fail**

If you are trying to let go of your legacy website and digital assets, and move towards a user-centric approach, the first step is to ensure you optimise for a mobile-first experience.

Brands must understand how users experience their site. This includes three important fields: how fast your site loads, how interactive your site is, and how visually stable your site is. Ensuring your mobile web experience is up to the task should start with site speed testing.

In our experience, almost all brands fail this. The majority of the sites we look at have a load speed of between eight and 11 seconds, when they should be around three seconds. And this is a problem that will hurt your bottom line.

In fact, the load speed goes well beyond a good user experience. Every second longer than the recommended load time of

three seconds results in a 7% lower conversion rate. What's more, Google's search algorithm includes page load time as one of its signals for search rankings, so your slow sites are pushing you further and further down the results page.

Before finding out how to fix the problem, why not take a quick challenge and put your website through its paces on this quick link.

**With a solid foundation, new tech can rapidly enhance digital assets**

Once you have the basics right, you can begin experimenting with some of the cool new tech. This is especially important for retailers looking to add new functionality to their branded apps. For instance, it is fairly easy to add AR functionality that can take SKUs and turn 2D photos into 3D images.

This kind of AR layering allows customers to experience your products in rich detail and even allows customers to experience virtual try-ons. The great thing about this kind of layering tech is that the software development kits (SDKs) are fairly easy to add and can quickly add catalogue-powered shopping lenses into the retailer's own app's product pages.

While these fun additions can be enticing, before embarking on this kind of work, it really helps retailers to conduct a design-thinking workshop to ensure they have fully thought through what problem they are solving. More importantly, they should be sure they are solving for the customer's needs, and not just doing it for the sake of it.

Technology has advanced so quickly, it can be overwhelming. And, with the retail sector stuck in a low-growth environment, finding any kind of competitive advantage must be a priority for every business leader. Rather than just rushing in though, take some time to get the basics right and then build on a solid foundation, protecting your brand along the way.

*To help retailers better understand the nuances of mobile strategies, Incubeta offers a range of Google Mini Labs to help brands develop marketing strategies that fits with their business and marketing objectives.*

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