

SME South Africa

Responses attributed to Jonathan Young, product manager for CloudGate

Q: Why should entrepreneurs consider product reviews as a branding tool?

A: Product reviews are cost effective. We think they're particularly effective for new, unknown, unrepresented products. If positioned correctly, and in the hands of influencers, the result is credibility and brand awareness by association.

Q: Does it work?

A: It has certainly worked for us. We partnered with a specialist agency, and out of all our marketing efforts, product reviews have been the most powerful thing, affecting our visibility, perception and the bottom line. In April 2014 Cloudgate as a brand did not exist, today (a mere 18 months later) we sell over 500 units per quarter on Takealot.com.

Q: What has it done for your brand?

A: Having our products reviewed by well-known tech experts and being reviewed in major national publications such as Financial Mail, gives our brand the power behind that media logo. The kind of credibility you just can't buy.

We have been endorsed by Aki Anastassiou (CNBC Africa), Arthur Goldstuck (Goldstuck on Gadgets and The Sunday Times) and the afternoon drive team at Metro FM amongst others, and that credibility stays with the brand. The perception change is permanent

Q: How do you go about doing it?

A: The success of our product review campaign is largely attributed to having a strategy in place. We hired a PR and marketing specialist agency, to create an engagement strategy and manage the relationships and ensure the media are managed accordingly. The review programme was tiered, making sure we started with the tech influencers, and then moved across to consumer and mainstream publications, radio and TV stations.

Q: What advice would you give to entrepreneurs who want to take the product review approach?

A: Be realistic about how many review units you have to offer the media, and also decide if these need to be returned after a set period of time, or if you're happy for these to be kept by the journalists.

Develop a working plan based on who your primary target audience is, how you want to engage with them, and what good looks like in terms of your return on investment.

Don't rely on reviews in isolation - there's got to be more than just a great product. Your website is increasingly becoming your shopfront, keep it up to date.

We'd suggest partnering with a specialist agency - one that not only fits your budget, but that understands your business, your industry and most critically the media. It is impossible to run a business and maintain a fully fledged review process on your own.