



Buyi Mafoko

BY EUGENE YIGA

The Business of Branding

Buyi Mafoko is taking Leratadima Marketing to new heights.

Born in Durban in the mid-1980s and raised by travelling parents, Buyi Mafoko describes her childhood as an adventurous one.

“My grandfather was a South African Breweries sales representative and subsequently worked in financial services, whereas my mother has always been in the hospitality industry,” she says. “Both roles meant that they could be assigned to any region around the country, which saw us move to small towns and main metros all over South Africa.”

And yet despite this transient life, her interests were and have always been rooted in the artistic capabilities that enabled her to express her creative character. She initially found her outlet in school sports, which in her view are expressions of art, and wanted to have an impact in whatever she did.

“I’ve always been attracted to the idea of bringing about real change in anything I participated in,” she says. “Your blessing or success lies in the area of your gift, and I have always had my gifts affirmed, and therefore understood that I was a gifted child with some uncommon capabilities. Although this response doesn’t settle on one career path, I am clear that marketing has given me a space within which to explore some of this inherent creativity.”

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The experience of studying at a different institution

The road to this, much like her childhood journeys, has been an adventurous one. After completing her secondary school education at Ferrum High School in Newcastle in 2004, she pursued an undergraduate degree in Human Movement Sciences at Wits University, a decision that was driven by her natural love for sports.

“It was maturing and a whole lot of fun,” she says of her time at the institution. “That environment has a way to help you discover yourself and grow up quickly. I also discovered my love for brands and their impact on our lives, which has captured me since.”

She then proceeded to do a postgraduate Management Diploma at Wits Business School, which she completed in 2011. She also obtained a Digital Marketing qualification from Vega School of Branding in 2015 and is currently studying the Board Development Series at GIBS, which is set out as a five-day short learning programme, ending in October 2018.

“As a Wits alumna, I wanted the experience of studying at a different institution,” she says. “GIBS has always been attractive to me for its excellent standard in education. The experience is certainly different because the institution is forward-thinking and dynamic in how it engages us as students. It’s given me a greater understanding of true strategic thinking.”

Showcasing operational excellence

Indeed, for someone who began her career in marketing without any formal qualification, the further education has been invaluable. She’s also found great value throughout her employment, with early roles at companies such as Adidas Group and Virgin Active.

“I have always been fascinated with brands and their involvement in our everyday lives,” she says. “My affinity to building brands was asserted at publishing giant Media24, where I joined a marketing team that worked on distinguished brands such as *True Love* magazine.”

In 2011, she joined Leratadima Marketing, which was established as an outdoor advertising business in 2007 (self-funded by the founding members) and recommended a re-brand that would position it as an integrated marketing agency set on client value creation. Fast forward to the present and she’s now managing director, leading a team of fifteen full-time employees and often more as the company scales up as needed based on the scope of any given project.

“The growth was organic as we had the inherent experience to firmly progress our offering to include branding, design, trade

marketing and strategy,” she says. “It was an opportune time for us to enter the market as a 100% black-owned agency that would showcase operational excellence, which challenged the usual perception of mediocrity.”

A partner in growth

The overall objective of the business is to build African brands, which it does through its creative, strategic and experiential services. Typical clients include those in the financial (Diners Club, Standard Bank), automotive (BMW Group South Africa), and FMCG (South African Breweries) sectors.

“We’re not built on the traditional agency understanding,” she says. “We aim to be a partner in growth that helps clients define their frustrations and solve real brand challenges within their market segments. What appeals to them is our agility and always-on business culture that responds rapidly to their business needs.”

Her work as MD involves understanding client business strategy for the year, identifying challenges that act as barriers to realising these objectives, and conceiving unique campaign experiences that bridge the gap between the brand and the envisaged consumer.

“It’s a big responsibility being entrusted with helping our clients establish or improve their competitive advantage at a time when so many brands compete for the same consumer headspace,” she says. “We have to be innovative in resolving real brand problems for our clients, and it’s the process of birthing creative strategies that keeps me up.”

More than just being creative, she’s a firm believer in being consistent. By refusing to restrict her capabilities, she’s found

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that the passion is what sustains her. “It’s an exciting time being part of the rising digital revolution,” she says. “Opportunities to innovate are everywhere.”

Consistently developing its strategy

It took the business five years to break even and a further two before it was profitable. It is now growing sustainably, which she attributes to an understanding it has in consistently developing its strategy to service the clients it likes.

“We aim to distinguish ourselves to our clients who have multiple agencies by de-cluttering our service offering, and simplifying the unique value we can give them,” she says. “We’ve grown primarily through word-of-mouth from testimonials and referrals by other clients. This presents an opportunity for us to pitch our credentials and services, resulting in the acquisition of business.”

As a business, the goal is to understand and therefore lead the insights conversation on how clients develop their level of preparedness for the impact of and transition to technological shifts such as the Internet of Things. This is why she believes it’s so important for the business to refine the service offering and carve out a niche in its established markets.

“We have to future-proof our businesses and ensure that they are adaptive and relevant to the consumers of the future; likewise, for our clients,” she says. “Our bigger goal is to break down the boundary lines and operate at full capacity in all our divisions across the continent. We would then have fulfilled our vision to build African brands.”

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Key Lessons

Live your company values

We recently had to decline an opportunity to work with a competitor client in a space that we’re comfortable in. This wasn’t a difficult decision as it ensured we upheld our value of integrity. Not pursuing the opportunity was a better decision for us because we didn’t risk an existing relationship we’ve worked hard at building.

Trust your instincts

Above all the formal education, I am most qualified through faith. I am a stern believer in the ability to have confidence in something bigger than ourselves and trust beyond the restrictions of our own minds to tap into our creative power.

Find quiet time

The hardest part about the work is not being able to shut down because I see opportunities everywhere. But my first calling is as a wife and mother to two happy boys. I balance it all by ensuring that I reserve time for myself where I can be still, recharge, and show up engaged in all my roles. **GIBS**