

#BehindtheSelfie with... Anna Vaulina

 By Leigh Andrews

20 Jun 2018

This #YouthMonth, we go behind the selfie with 'just-35' Anna Vaulina - head of retention and customer experience for Showmax, she also moonlights as the head of marketing for the IAB SA, holds an MBA from the Gordon Institute of Business Science and has completed both a Harvard business and innovation leadership course and a Massachusetts Institute of Technology big data and analytics course.



Vaulina, seen Showmaxing with Sbusi Damini, HR business partner: Connected video group at Multichoice.

1. Where do you live, work and play?

Live: Born in Estonia, I now live in Johannesburg.

Work: I'm the head of retention and customer experience for Showmax, and I moonlight as the head of marketing for the IAB SA.

Play: Kids' playgrounds, magical sunny South Africa.

2. What's your claim to fame?

I once had a head-on collision with a small aircraft.

3. Describe your career so far.

I've spent the last nine years managing digital and pay-TV brands across Africa, as well as looking after the needs of our customers. It's been an exciting career and I've had an opportunity to launch new brands, products and services in South Africa and also across the continent, including DStv Now, Box Office and Showmax.



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I work with an incredible team and we thrive on facing big challenges head-on and finding creative ways to solve problems. As proud as I am to be part of the South African story, I'm also a global citizen, having worked in the UK on telco and digital brands.

4. Tell us a few of your favourite things.

Work: Seeing a new initiative move us closer to objectives, and being part of a passionate, high-performing team that works so well together.

Life: Seeing my toddler learn new things for the first time, sharing this beautiful country (and lots of wine) with my family and friends!

5. What do you love about your industry?

The speed at which it moves. Both digital, as well as the content space, becomes unrecognisable every 12 to 18 months and that's incredibly exciting for me, as someone who thrives on a bit of chaos.

This creates a lot of opportunities for growth, new entrants, new ways of doing what we're good at, and challenging the norm.

6. What are a few pain points your industry can improve on?

Measurement. Looking at it from a marketing point-of-view, I'm still seeing a lot of brands spend money without a clear channel attribution.



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I think the move to a stronger performance marketing mentality and closing the gap between marketing and analytics will solve it, but achieving diligent measurement is a slow process.

Diversity. The marketing and, more importantly, the digital space, has taken a long time to become more diverse. Diversity brings better solutions and perspectives, which is missing right now.

7. Describe your average workday, if such a thing exists.

Wake up by being kicked in the face by a toddler, school run, check in with the team, try to minimise on meetings to spend face-to-face time with the teams that need it.

Ensure that we're not working in silos and creating an environment for co-creation and growth in the business.

8. What are the tools of your trade?

- Amplitude for measurement, over and above Google Analytics and all the other platforms
- Braze for messaging and CRM
- A healthy dose of humour and understanding between different teams
- And did I mention wine?

9. Who is getting it right in your industry?

- Online brands like Takealot, Mr D and OrderIn, who are combining multiple marketing disciplines to target and reach relevant audiences.
- The big offlines, like Discovery.
- Some of the alcohol brands, which are merging e-commerce with traditional distribution channels.
- I'm always a fan of brands that are disciplined in their approach and react to the market in a relevant way.
- I'd say Showmax but that would be completely biased, right?

10. What are you working on right now?

Solving for customer growth, from a retention point of view. We all get obsessed with filling the funnel at the top, and many times it's not sustainable business when you have a leaky bucket below that and you're losing all your customers.



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So I'm looking at a couple of brands to ensure that we do retention right for our customers. That includes everything from marketing automation to actually ensuring we have a product value that's relevant for our customers.

11. Tell us some of the buzzwords floating around in your industry at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself.

- Growth marketing
- Social influencers
- Content marketing
- ROI
- Data-driven campaigns
- Ecosystem
- Co-creation

I'm guilty of using all of them myself.

12. Where and when do you have your best ideas?

Driving to and from the office. This gives me time to consolidate the day and gives me 40 (or more, if there's traffic) uninterrupted minutes to think.

13. What's your secret talent/party trick?

I speak fluent Russian, even though I speak English with a pure South African accent. People usually have a wide-eyed

reaction to me speaking in my mother tongue.

14. Are you a technophobe or a technophile?

I'm normal! I'm definitely an early adopter, but I am by no means obsessive. We have a Google Home assistant that only assists us in playing music because we can't be bothered to connect the whole home, so I'm definitely in the upper quadrant but by no means extreme!

15. What would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

I'm quite diligent at keeping my apps clean and keeping only the apps I use regularly. Photos, well that's a different kettle of fish altogether.

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There are reams and reams of toddler, dog, and whiteboard photos so I don't forget what we scribbled. Actually, I have a habit of writing on our tables, which can also serve as 'white boards' and there are a ton of those on my phone.

16. What advice would you give to newbies hoping to crack into the industry?

Persevere, persevere, persevere! And arm yourself with the latest knowledge.

“ It's no use having a general idea about things; there are so many open courses online that in this day and age if you're passionate about a topic, there's no reason you can't educate and practice in it online. ”

Simple as that, and such wise words for #YouthMonth! Follow Vulina on the following social media platforms: [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [LinkedIn](#); follow Showmax on these: [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) and follow the IAB SA on these: [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#), and visit the [Showmax press office](#) for their latest updates.

*Interviewed by [Leigh Andrews](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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