

Expansion plans into Africa for 99c



By Louise Marsland

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Natasha Omokhodion-Banda is the new managing director of the Lusaka, Zambia, office of Ninety9cents (99c), responsible for growing the agency further into Africa. She is our #AfricaAchiever for this month.



Natasha Omokhodion-Banda

Andrew Brand, managing director at 99c said that the opening of the Lusaka office was new territory and finding the right person was key to its success. “Natasha’s passion and drive to do great work is extremely admirable and something we look for in our people, while her impeccable credentials gives us a strategic edge to create real momentum in the market. I have every faith that she will help us make our mark as a pan-African independent group.”

Omokhodion-Banda’s experience spans a decade across a wide range of disciplines, including media planning and buying, public relations, event management, brand development, and corporate communications. She has previously held positions as media specialist at Zamtel (Zambia), head of media and public relations at The Jupiter Drawing Room in Lusaka, and country head of marketing at Ecobank Zambia.

■ What is your business focus right now?

Our immediate business focus is to grow a strong, passionate and successful agency in Zambia. Therefore, our initial priority is to recruit the best talent and to look for opportunity to work with great brands with whom we can grow long term relationships with over the next few years.

■ What is 99c' strategy on the continent?

99c has the vision to create Africa’s foremost continental communications group – born in Africa for Africa. Zambia has now been set up as a hub - which should eventually be able to support growth into the rest of its region, while our SA offices are already set up to service the BLNS region (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland). We want to invest holistically in each of our African start-ups, rather than just ‘stick a placard on the front door’. By doing so, we will be contributing to the communications industry in each of these markets, while being a positive player in their economies through job creation, skills development and in-country outsourcing. We believe that this will give us genuine long-term sustainable presence on the continent.

■ How will you grow the brand in Africa?

We believe that building the agency across borders will allow for the application of best practice and learnings between different markets. We are also looking at long-term growth in Africa, which essentially means being an authentic player that's in it for the long-term with a strong focus on sustainability. How do we achieve this? Through hiring the best talent, partnering with the best suppliers, maximising inter-agency support within the group, and genuine commitment to the up-skilling of talent across all our agencies.

■ The biggest trends to note in your industry?

For Zambia, in particular, the macro-economic trends are looking positive with, for example, a stabilised currency, improved agricultural yields and lower inflation and interest rates. New diversification policies have been put in place which allow for the opening up of new industries and sectors, thereby creating a buoyed industrial and economic environment which will require more service providers across the board to support their growth ambitions, with integrated communications being one of them.

■ What is your main challenge?

The primary challenge we face at the moment is being the 'new guys on the block', which of course means that nobody knows us this side of the Limpopo. However, we feel that this challenge presents an opportunity for us to really be who we are and to demonstrate to the market, our in-country capabilities while leveraging the strength of our experience, structures and resources (300 strong team) in South Africa.

■ How do you hope to make an impact in the industry?

For 99c – no matter in which office - it's all about focusing on our core values, which is firstly to create work that works. Then it's about contributing to the building of brands and businesses for the long term through lasting relationships and transparency and best practice. Our entire reason for being is to demonstrably deliver value to our clients in all we do, and we believe this is especially relevant in the broader African context.

■ Where do you draw your creative inspiration?

I am inspired by everything around me and my environment. Most of my inspiration comes from everyday men and women working hard to try to leave a better future for their children. I also believe in reading, travelling and conversation with strangers – its always amazing how you can find creative nuggets in everyday life.

■ How do you inspire others?

I try to inspire others by the example I set which I would like to think can be found in my work ethic, my undying optimism for my country and continent, and my genuine belief in the success of this generation.

■ Your life philosophy?

Wow... I think life's lessons have given me quite a few! My basic foundation is found in the love of God and therefore mankind – to do good while being good. I also genuinely believe in daring to take on challenges and to find the opportunities that lie within them rather than focusing on the barriers. Finally, in the words of my late grandfather, "the animal that tries to imitate an elephant is only wasting his time..." Just be yourself, and hone your talents - you have been designed to pursue your own purpose.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

Louise Burgers (previously Marsland) is Founder/Content Director: SOURCE Content Marketing Agency. Louise is a Writer, Publisher, Editor, Content Strategist, Content/Media Trainer. She has written about consumer trends, brands, branding, media, marketing and the advertising communications industry in SA and across Africa, for over 20 years, notably, as previous Africa Editor: Bizcommunity.com; Editor: Bizcommunity Media/Marketing SA; Editor-in-Chief: AdVantage magazine; Editor: Marketing Mx magazine; Editor: Progressive Retailing magazine; Editor: BusinessBrief magazine; Editor: FMOG Files newsletter. Web: www.sourceagency.co.za.

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