

A day in the lockdown life of Grid Worldwide MD Masego Motsogi

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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"As things stand, it's critical that we over-communicate opposed to under. Firstly, as an Exco, we meet every morning to assess our people. They are our most valued asset and their well-being before anything is our main priority. Then we discuss each active client's needs and their respective requirements and determine what that means from an operational point of view for the day and the rest of the week.

"We also meet as a management team to assess the lay of the land. We have observed that things are changing rather speedily and that there is new information coming at us constantly. We are constantly reviewing the agency temperament and plug holes where they need to be plugged. What is of critical importance for us is to remain in executing work for our client partners and this keeps us occupied over and above ensuring that we have a functional and strong team." – MD of Grid Worldwide, Masego Motsogi's account of work-life in the time of Covid-19.

■ **What was your initial response to the crisis or lockdown and has your experience of lockdown been different to what you expected?**

Having followed the news since January on how various countries had been dealing with the upsurge of cases and how that impacted societies, we knew that we would have to act quickly when it reached our shores. Most of our teams started working from home as early as the second week of March. This gave a glimpse into what the possibility of working under lockdown would look like.

My experience of lockdown? I don't think anyone could have anticipated what it was going to look like. It has, however, pleasantly surprised me in that it feels like I'm connected to the team better than was initially the case. And on the other side, although I cannot give her my full attention, me being within eye- or earshot has my daughter experiencing all spectrums of excitement.

It has mostly been positive.



Masego Motsogi, MD at Grid Worldwide



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■ **Comment on the impact of the pandemic on the agency and creative industry or economy as a whole.**

The pandemic has had quite an adverse impact on the economy with many industries being considered 'non-essential'. This means that for many, production has halted and for others because of the limited access to markets in the form of consumers, revenues have reduced and as such budgets are being cut.

What this means for us as the creative industry are the inevitable budget cuts and in turn, reduced work, which comes with its own set of challenges.

This does, however, open up opportunities to think innovatively around the creative solutions we have become accustomed to offering our clients and the format in which these are disbursed.

It's time to relook the concept of creativity and how mainstream branding and advertising can be augmented to offer on- and offline experiences that are meaningful and have an impact for both consumer and brand.

▣ ***How is the agency responding to the crisis and current lockdown?***

As much as there's work to do, we also remind ourselves that there is the need to be social and share our true selves. Work comes first but we definitely make time for fun amongst our daily interactions. This ranges from sharing exercise routines, jokes and a whole lot of other things. We've also discovered incredible talents which have been incredible to watch!

From a work perspective, we have certainly noted a different kind of creative product, spurred on by client briefs of course but not negating the fact that we are seeing the world through a brand-new lens. So, there is more innovative thinking, there is greater thought that is given to how our proposed creative solutions not only help the world but how they can be entertaining and inspiring while delivering on business objectives.



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▣ ***Comment on the challenges and opportunities.***

The lack of facetime with team members certainly does come at a price, especially when it comes to creative reviews, but we are learning to navigate around those and extract the best out of everyone.

We also can't ignore that we have people with different dispositions that make up the agency and with this comes the different ways people react to this extraordinary event. This has, however, allowed us to get to know each other better, which certainly gives rise to better working relations and results in more robust conversations when it comes to the work.

As much as we have come from being a branding agency, we have certainly grown to offer more to our client partners and other stakeholders. Covid-19 has allowed us to demonstrate our capabilities in terms of delivering creative solutions for various businesses. This is something we will continue to grow into to continue to create meaning in our immediate industry and the world at large.

▣ ***Speaking of opportunities, the world has really turned to creativity during this time. Why do you think this is the case and what does this mean for the industry, agencies and their clients or brands?***

I personally have always believed that we are in the most fortunate position to influence culture and the way in which the world thinks as an industry. This being one of the main reasons why I opted to go to advertising school. Add to that the technological innovations and how we have generally been on the early adopters' curve, it's only sound to look to creativity for solutions.

“ By its very own definition, creativity is about the ability to see the world in new ways and so we are primed for this. ”

What has had to happen very quickly is to advance this new thinking beyond a TV script but into ideas that change the world, channelled by brands. I see this period being the time we will look back at in history, calling it 'where the evolution of our industry happened'. To date, we have spoken extensively about how we as an industry do things amazingly and differently but I think this time has more than forced us to stop paying lip service and to rather show it in what we present to

the world.



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■ ***How has the lockdown affected your staff? What temporary HR policies have you put in place regarding remote working, health & safety, etc.?***

As said above, we have noted that some people are managing better than others. This is to be expected with any situation. What we have put in place is a guardian policy – we have various team leaders (not all management) having regular check-ins with team members.

Also, where we have our agency update on a quarterly basis, we have made these weekly updates where we provide clarity and a view of the week (or as far as we can make out) to make sure that no one is left behind.

■ ***How are you navigating 'physical distancing' while keeping your team close-knit and aligned and your clients happy?***

Most of our meetings that happened pre-Covid-19 have remained, the only thing that has changed is the medium and this includes our client meetings. We continue to have our planning sessions every Monday and have check-ins daily. This has helped retain a level of normalcy and I believe has given the team the energy to keep delivering.

■ ***What are you busy working on? Any initiatives/campaigns relating to the coronavirus?***

There are several projects we are working on.

- Our Covid-19 information portal: www.tbwa-covid19-tracker.herokuapp.com
- Our creative contribution to the Solidarity Fund
- www.howyoucanhelp.co.za

Amongst the few that we are working on, I am keenly interested in the Masks project. Having grown up in Soweto, I know how tight things can be as a result of historical spatial planning. It, therefore, is so important for me that we help in whatever form we can to help in reducing the possibility of infection and this one project for me reaches that far. We also know that the Covid-19 will be resident in the world for some time to come and there are several other initiatives that we are working on that we will be implementing going forward.

■ ***Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of advertising/marketing in any way?***

It has reaffirmed what I have always believed in, that we are capable of more than we think we are. What I believe we should do from the crisis, given that creative industries are called on to help shift things, is to reassert ourselves as the experts that we are. Many may not be 'BCom Twitter' or have MBCHB qualifications, but we certainly do have a role to play.

I hope that this also instils confidence in companies that when other departments could not do much, marketing had the access to speak to its audiences and keep them top of mind – minimise the cost-centre mentality and up the trust scores.

■ ***Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?***

- *Back to brand:* The world had become about selling, and selling and selling with little communication about what brands stood for.
- *Virtual Showcases:* We have seen many entertainers go virtual. I especially enjoyed John Legend and Andrea

Bocelli's shows, and I would like to see more brands getting involved in such kind of shows.

- *E-(but not quite) commerce*: E-commerce has grown quite substantially. I have noted smaller businesses giving vouchers for advanced booking to secure their businesses. Perhaps something will emerge out of running businesses this way.
- *Humility and humanity*: I've often lamented that minimised use of the word 'Ubuntu', which in short translates to: 'I am because we are', i.e. no one can prosper alone. Let's just be decent human beings.

▀ **Your key message to fellow industry folk?**

I would say, 'We go'n be alright', but I won't. Seriously though, I do think that this is an opportunity for us to review what we have done and deliberate on the value we truly add to our client's businesses.

Plus, I also think that with clients leaning more on us this time, we will emerge somewhat stronger and connected – not only amongst ourselves but to the realities of their world, and this will make our creative solutions meaningful.

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