

Karena Crerar takes on the role of MD of Edelman South Africa

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As Edelman Africa fosters deeper collaboration with its peers in the Middle East, the leading pan-African communications firm has expanded its executive team with several new internal promotions.

The global communications firm recently announced an integration between its Middle East and Africa (MEA) offices as part of a renewed strategy focused on unlocking growth through international collaboration. Through leveraging of talent across both regions, the new operating entity will provide greater scale across the continent in order to best service its client base of established and fast-growing brands.

After several years of expanding the firm's Advisory Practice, Karena Crerar will be taking on the role of managing director for South Africa where she will oversee the firm's business across South Africa.



Karena Crerar

I catch up with Karena Crerar to find out more about her appointment as managing director of Edelman South Africa.

■ *Congrats on your appointment as the Managing Director for Edelman South Africa. How do you feel about your new role?*

Thank you so much! I'm so delighted to be in this role. This is the biggest privilege of my career so far – to be selected to lead a successful, growing business; to be working alongside such a talented team within an amazing supportive and collaborative culture is truly special.

▣ **How and when did this come about/when does it take effect?**

Edelman's renewed global strategy focuses on unlocking growth through international collaboration and that will see us integrating much more closely across markets, sectors and practices in order to offer our clients and our people the best of our thinking and opportunities. As a result of this focus, our CEO for Africa, Jordan Rittenberry took on an expanded role of chairman, Middle East and Africa, while retaining his position as CEO of Edelman Africa, and this meant more focus and attention to individual markets on the continent. I was promoted from my role as head of our Advisory Practice to take on the role of managing director for our South Africa operations. The role has taken effect already.

▣ **What do you love most about your career, the industry and what you do?**

I've been working in the communications' industry for over 20 years, with most of that time spent in an agency environment. I love the diversity of clients and sectors, and being at the coalface of business decision-making. I also really enjoyed the time I spent in-house, it was an invaluable learning experience and has enriched and enhanced the communications counsel I'm able to give our clients.

“ Communications is an exciting industry to be in at the moment – as communicators we have a unique opportunity to help guide organisations and brands through unprecedented changes, particularly experienced over the last year, through our understanding of reputation, audiences, messaging and channels. ”

This, coupled with the energy, pace and collaborative nature of how we work together as a team to help our clients achieve their goals is what motivates me the most.

▣ **Innovation and creativity is key, especially in the time of Covid-19. What can organisations no longer ignore when it comes to strategy?**

Given the importance of communications over this recent period, we've seen an evolution of communications strategy becoming deeply entwined with business strategy. In addition to remaining innovative and creative, organisations have had to really find new ways to connect with customers on a human level. The notion of being customer-centric, although often used by many organisations over the years has to be implemented in an effective way.

“ Organisations also have to ensure that they're tapped into culture and society so that there's an authenticity and relevance in how and who they communicated to. Volume of content remains a challenge and finding ways to breakthrough the clutter will be key to landing messages. ”

We're also working closely with organisations on how they think about purpose – without a 'why' it's increasingly difficult to chart a sustainable course forward and it's even more difficult to take employees on that journey with you.

▣ **Before the pandemic, brands were able to plan and prepare for potential crises based on known risks. What advice do you have for other organisations on how to manage a crisis?**

The face of crisis is changing and having a one-size-fits-all approach to crisis is not effective. Having studied trust for over 20 years at Edelman, we know that trust matters and is the most important currency to have in the bank. This means that you're constantly executing a communications programme built on trust with stakeholders, rather than jumping into a reactive stance when a crisis happens.

“ The Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us that we can't always plan for every scenario and crisis, but organisations can ensure that they are more resilient in the face of it. ”

▣ **What trends could we expect to see in the coming year?**

Over the past year, we've seen the importance of employee engagement and internal communications come to the fore as people have adjusted to working remotely, and this is something that will definitely continue into 2021. Related to this, an increased focus on diversity and inclusion as organisations refocus on employees as priority stakeholders.

Brands will need to think about earning attention in new ways, traditional methods are no longer as effective, as people look for engaging content that speaks directly to their interests.

We're seeing a trend towards rationalising agency services where organisations are looking for marketing and communications support from fewer providers. Successful agencies will have more diverse offerings and be able to apply strategic oversight end to end.

As we go into 2021, organisations will be thinking about rebuilding trust among their stakeholders. People don't necessarily want to hear a brand talking only about the products that they sell, they want to know what the brand is doing to create a positive impact with its customers and the communities within which it operates.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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