

# Zumi Njongwe relocates to Diageo SA

 By Jessica Tennant

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Diageo South Africa has appointed Zumi Njongwe as marketing and innovations director for SA, after two years in the same position at Diageo's Meta Abo Breweries in Ethiopia and having been with the company since 2005 working in various roles across Africa and in London.

"Diageo is big on growing talent from within. My career path since joining the company in 2005 has taken me across different categories, brands, roles and countries. I am coming full circle by returning home to South Africa and to my next growth point," comments Njongwe.

"I am very excited about being back in South Africa and working with the phenomenal team here – I am especially passionate about where Diageo SA is going and what that means for growing our talent.

"Diageo people are very entrepreneurial, very connected to consumer and shopper trends with a great track record of performance driving marketing," she goes on.

Here, more about the Diageo person of Njongwe...

## ■ **How do you feel about being appointed marketing and innovations director for SA?**

SA is my home so having this opportunity is energising and exciting for me. In addition, this is the leading spirits market in Africa and one of the top 10 markets globally, which adds to the appeal. Having had experience in different markets I feel I can contribute positively to the growth of Diageo locally. The benefit of being part of Diageo is that we can share the knowledge from this and other markets to take the best of the learning and drive growth here.

## ■ **Same role, different location; how does the role differ from that at Diageo's Meta Abo Breweries in Ethiopia?**

In Ethiopia, my focus was on increasing volume and market share across beer brands while simultaneously broadening Diageo's portfolio and visibility with our spirits offering. In South Africa, my focus will be on creating a winning, vibrant premium spirits portfolio.

Diageo is the single biggest producer of spirits in the world, operating in more than 180 countries. It owns five of the top whiskies in South Africa (Johnnie Walker, J&B, Bells, Vat 69, Black & White) and is the market leader in vodka, rum and gin (Smirnoff, Captain Morgan and Tanqueray) all of which are gaining traction in SA, so it is going to be busy!



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## ■ **What do you love most about your career and marketing in particular?**

I am grateful for all the opportunities I have been given and have grabbed them with both hands.

*“ I love how marketing creates fantastic consumer experiences that are central to how people enjoy life and socialise with those they love. At the end of the day, we are helping create great memories and that's really rewarding. ”*

Of course, it helps that this field is very dynamic. I am constantly learning new things. Who could have predicted that digital would fundamentally change the way we plan our strategies or that the third space (socialising outside of home and bars) would grow as fast as it has?

Marketing is a balance between art and science that engages my left and right brain in different ways. Implementing best practice marketing has won my team some great awards like the African Hero Awards, *Sunday Times* Top Brands, Loeries and an Azmera New Innovation Award.

■ ***Impressive! Any other highlights you're particularly proud of.***

I have been fortunate to grow in this industry working in various positions, seeing real results that have grown the brands and business that I have worked on. I'm particularly proud of growing others and achieving great business results. If I have to name my proudest achievements it would be the promotion of those who have worked with me and turning around market share of our key brands.



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■ ***Tell us about your involvement in Eteage and the Spirited Women of Brandhouse (SWOB) and why initiatives such as these are important to you.***

My involvement with these initiatives has been very fulfilling. My aim, always, is to empower, inspire and grow female talent in whatever way I can and to really be the embodiment of what is possible for women in the workplace.

*“ My personal and career growth has been a result of coaching, management and guidance from various mentors in my life, many of whom have been women, including those in my own family. I have always felt a strong need to ensure I pass onto others, especially women, what was done for me. ”*

I am also a mother to a six-year-old daughter so there is personal relevance for me. I am passionate about the empowerment of women, I believe our time is now, so I am excited to facilitate and share my experience; it is incredibly rewarding.

■ ***What are you most looking forward to?***

I am looking forward to instilling best practice in how we market our brands and the overall business strategy, plus great execution always equals great results. In achieving our ambition as a business it opens up many career opportunities. South Africa is a very competitive market which forces us to think about how to create the future differently in order to really stand out and grow faster.

*“ Working in one of the biggest spirits markets globally is testament to the role Africa has to play in the growth of Diageo and for us to put Africa on the map is something close to my heart. ”*

One of the most important things my wonderful mentors have taught me is that it's a privilege to lead because really there is nothing special about any of us who are blessed to be where we are and so we must continue to listen, learn, adapt and drive the right outcomes for those who have bestowed that privilege on us.

Diageo has a great track record in performance driven marketing, the team are entrepreneurial, very connected to

consumers and shoppers and are highly aware of leadership requirements to drive long-term sustainable growth.

### ■ **What's at the top of your to-do list?**

As I have been away from South Africa for a couple of years, I am looking forward to familiarising myself with what consumers really want, how the media landscape has changed and how we look to beat competition.

“ We have phenomenal brands that have thrived over many decades and centuries, so the responsibility to carry the legacy of those founding fathers is a privilege. ”

John Walker, Pyotr Arsenievich Smirnov (Smirnoff), Charles Tanqueray (Tanqueray), Giacomo Justerini (J&B) means our role to preserve these iconic brands is a big one but also a great opportunity to leave them healthier for future custodians.

### ■ **What are you currently reading/watching/listening to for work?**

Lots of work-related documents. I also enjoy reading great novels. I am currently getting into *The Shining Girls* by Lauren Beukes. I used to read a lot more but time is hard to come by with a crazy work schedule and family and friend commitments.

African literature is a great passion of mine so when time allows I get into that, otherwise newspapers and magazines are my monthly staple. I do enjoy all genres of music. I'm looking forward to getting back to attending live music concerts; we really are spoilt for choice in Africa.

### ■ **Tell us something about yourself not generally known.**

I am a Katshehong girl. K1 stand up. I love to dance. I have no problem burning up the dance floor much to my kids' dismay! I really do dance like nobody is watching. Life is too short.

## ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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