

'Do you, boo!' says Mpume Ngobese, co-MD at Joe Public

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Having served on the judges' panels of some of the most prestigious awards in the industry, Mpume Ngobese has an impressive portfolio that includes working on some of South Africa's most iconic brands such as Nedbank, British American Tobacco, and South African Breweries' corporate brand.



Mpume Ngobese, co-MD at Joe Public

We chat with Ngobese to find out about how she got into the industry, some highlights and some of the real challenges females face in the advertising industry...

■ ***Can you tell us a bit about who Mpume Ngobese is?***

I am a Zulu girl from Newcastle in KwaZulu-Natal, who grew up in a convent, graduated from the University of Natal a hundred years ago and I am now the co-MD at [Joe Public](#). I am also a shareholder and partner in the Joe Public United group.

■ ***You're the co-MD at Joe Public. Tell us more about your role here***

I joined Joe Public in 2013 as business unit director and, having joined an agency that places the growth of people as its number one pillar, over the years I was able to work my way up to this role.

As co-MD, my primary role is to champion client relationships by ensuring that we deliver the right product for the brand, at the right time and on budget, through excellent service.

The role also requires excellent project management skills, an excellent understanding of strategy and media, an obsession for creativity, and the courage to do whatever (good) it takes to deliver an excellent creative product.

This involves mastering a delicate balancing act between client pressure and excellent product delivery.



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■ ***Can you briefly share your journey of how you entered into the industry?***

I stumbled upon this industry, actually. After graduating from university, I started my career at Johnnic Publishing, working in the group editorial office. The publishing group at the time owned a lot of magazines, newspapers and books publishing houses.

So, I was drawn to the advertising side of the business, through adverts placed in magazines and newspapers. I then moved to the agency world, where I was involved in both trade and customer marketing, then branched off to brand strategy and design, which then led me to the integrated communications space at Joe Public United.

■ ***What are some career highlights for yourself?***

I have had loads of highlights over the years, from winning pitches and new accounts to getting great jobs, and working with great people, but because I have spent most of my working life at Joe Public, I'll mention one key highlight from Joe.

“ In 2019, Joe Public United did a transformation deal that took Joe Public from being the largest independently owned agency to becoming the largest independent, Black-owned agency in the country, with 60% of its ownership being in Black hands. ”

The notable thing about this transformation deal is that through Ikamva Lakusasa, a company that my Black partners and I created, we own 26% of Joe Public United shares. We are active board members, which gives us rights to vote and make decisions on behalf of the business.

■ ***You're quite an influential figure in the advertising industry. A creative, part-time lecturer and board member. How do you juggle all of this?***

Thank you! Yes, and I also judge quite a lot of creative and business awards.

Confucius once said, “choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life”. I really find this to be true. I manage to juggle work responsibilities through my routine, which I see as a reward to myself. If I am not working, I give myself time to sleep a lot, read a lot and watch a lot of movies, just to feed my mind and soul so that when I need to get going with work again, I do so with much energy and ambition.



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■ ***As a female, have you faced any challenges in the industry? If so, how did you overcome them?***

I wouldn't say that the challenges I have faced are unique to our industry. They are more social norms where women's choices are generally questioned. In addition to that, I would say I personally continue to experience the challenges that Black women face whilst navigating through life in general. Black women have to navigate the intertwined barriers at the intersection of race and gender. That intersectionality is a tricky reality to navigate, but I would say that the courage to own who I am is what is helping me navigate through life.

■ ***Comment on the gender pay gap in the advertising industry.***

This is actually a global issue and across all industries. In South Africa, it is reported that this challenge seems to affect women in the middle and upper wage bands the most.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the average global gap is about 20%, with the World Economic Forum having recently stated that closing the gender pay gap will take an extra 36 years, due to Covid-19.

A sad reality of South Africa was recently published by Prof Anita Bosch and Shimon Barit from the University of Stellenbosch Business School. In their [report](#), they declared that South Africa has a stagnant median gender pay gap of between 23% and 35%. This is supported by the respective 2020-2021 body of research done by PwC, Ipsos and the Stats SA's [Inequality Trends in SA](#) report.

Zooming into our industry, I must highlight that through our industry regulatory body, the Association for Communication and Advertising (ACA), the industry continues to address this challenge in an equitable manner. Salary reports, surveys and audits by member agencies continue to be prioritised. The various remuneration and benefit scales are made transparent and implementation by human resource practitioners is strongly encouraged in order for our industry to be properly balanced.

■ ***What more would you like to see happen in this industry?***

I would love to see the industry going back to basics.

“ We make ads. We tell stories. We shape culture. We delight. We inspire. ”

If our industry spends an average of R40bn in media advertising per year, let us refocus our energies towards our refining craft so that the work that we do generates business value. Let us avoid being trapped in the deadly cycle of overprocessing work that ultimately devalues the media space we are filling.

■ ***What advice do you have to share with the future generation of females entering the advertising industry?***

Be unapologetically you. Women bring a different perspective, an essential perspective to a team. Have a passion for creativity. It is said that creativity impacts the world. I agree that it does.

■ ***As we celebrate Women's Month in South Africa. Do you have any words of encouragement for all the women out there? Own yourself. Have a passion. Have a point of view. Be brave. Dare to grow. Always be kind. And... do you, boo.***

■ ***What is your involvement in the Pendoring Awards 2021? and what are you looking forward to most about the awards this year?***

In this month of August 2021, I was one of the speakers at the Pendoring students' webinar. The aim was to inspire students at creative institutions to create pioneering work that heroes South Africa's indigenous languages. The importance of creating a multilingual society is a subject that is close to my heart.

Oh, and I hope that the Pendoring board asks me to adjudicate again this year as I had an incredible experience as Jury President at the 2020 Pendoring Awards.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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