

New marketing and digital agency, Marketing Grit launches



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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[Marketing Grit](#) is a Cape Town-based boutique marketing and digital agency that fuses 'solid' strategy, creative thinking and experience to create a unique offering that makes a positive difference to brands that desire accelerated and sustainable success.



Noëleen Bruton, co-owner of Marketing Grit

Co-owned by marketing aficionados Noëleen Bruton and Debbie Combrink, the recently established specialist marketing agency offers strategic support, digital strategy and social media implementation.

Noëleen Bruton and Debbie Combrink previously worked together at Tsogo Sun in Johannesburg before independently relocating to the Cape. First to make the move was Debbie Combrink who joined The TOPS at SPAR Wine Show as CEO. During her three year tenure, the 7-cities national tour saw record-breaking results as a result of Combrink's extensive marketing and eventing experience

After 19 years at Tsogo Sun, including seven years as group marketing director for Tsogo Sun Gaming and Properties, Noëleen Bruton resigned in 2018 and moved to Cape Town at the end of that year. In the early part of 2019, she took up employment with Pam Golding Properties as group marketing director before finally 'taking the plunge' this year to pursue her passion to become an entrepreneur and run her own agency which led to the establishment of Marketing Grit and subsequent business partnership with Combrink.

Having worked with or for many top local brands as well as a host of leading international brands, Bruton brings a wealth of marketing experience to Marketing Grit clients.

This experience, together with Combrink's 25-year career in the hospitality and events industry combines the forces of two industry leaders and their impeccable skill sets to offer the services of a results-driven marketing and digital solutions company for medium-sized businesses

Noëleen Bruton, co-owner of Marketing Grit, shares more...

■ ***Congrats on the launch of Marketing Grit. Tell us more about the agency?***

Marketing Grit is founded by two experienced marketers who, after years of senior corporate experience wanted to "go it on their own" and start an agency that had strategy and creativity at its core.

■ ***When and how did the idea come about?***

Following a lifestyle move to Cape Town, together with Debbie Combrink, we wanted to do something different – something that embraced digital but still adopted sound marketing principles and creative thinking. We wanted to start an agency that could really make a difference to brands – where we could apply our extensive experience to help companies meet their objectives – despite the tough economic times we are all facing.

■ ***What is the core function of Marketing Grit?***

Marketing Grit has three core offerings

1. Strategic marketing consulting
2. Digital strategy
3. Digital and social media implementation

■ ***What's the one thing that makes Marketing Grit stand out from other marketing and digital agencies?***

Although digital had a significant impact on businesses pre-Covid (think about it – way back in 2009 internet advertising revenue overtook traditional advertising), Covid has undoubtedly accelerated digital adoption.

As a result, there have been absolutely loads of companies offering miracle solutions and instant success training courses. The latest Facebook workshop, click-through button or '5 steps how Instagram can triple your revenue' - is just not going to explode your business – these are tactics and although 'some' may yield short term results ... they are largely fads.

Any company wishing to succeed in the long term needs to focus their time and energy on conceptual thinking, then strategy and finally tactics.

We subscribe to "Slow Down to Go Faster"

There are many great digital agencies and marketing consultancies out there. We hope to distinguish ourselves by providing the IP, the wealth, experience, and 'weight' of the larger consultants – albeit by being more accessible, client focussed and agile. Both of us have also 'stayed in school' and kept up with changing technologies – many companies offer one or the other (marketing or digital) – we believe strongly and passionately in both.

As stated on our website:

“ We are not strategic cookie cutters, nor are we old sages (although we do have vast in-depth and senior experience) - we simply believe in the power of strategy, ideas, and innovative thinking – to influence people, change attitudes, stir emotion, and inspire action. The kind that leads to revenue. ”

■ **What are some of the services Marketing Grit will be offering?**

Firstly, we will work with companies to explore how they can evolve in these rather turbulent times (thrive not just survive).

Secondly, we will work with them to develop a strategy that gives them the best possibility to achieve their vision and goals. Lastly (and still very importantly) we will either guide them on how to get it done or assist them in the actual implementation.

- Largely because of Covid, many organisations have had to ‘let go’ of some senior expensive executives (over 2,2 million were lost in the second quarter of 2020 alone) – these companies still however require the relevant marketing and strategic input at the table – and this is where we come in.
- Companies may want to provide assistance (and depth) to their existing teams and outsource key skills.
- Organisations often are so close they “can’t see the woods for the trees”. A fresh, objective and specialised perspective can be hugely beneficial.

■ **What has the biggest challenge been with starting a business in a time of Covid-19?**

Undoubtedly the biggest challenge has been not being able to connect in-person with people – whether it is interviewing and recruiting staff, taking briefs or brainstorming – people in ‘real life’ generate energy that is difficult to replicate remotely.

We also take great solace (and motivation) at the rather prestigious list of companies that started in bad times and succeeded despite the odds. In our boardroom we have a framed list of organisations we’ve called ‘Against all Odds’ - as an ever-present reminder that we are in good company troubling times be damned!

This list includes:

- Hewlett-Packard (1937-1938 Recession) ...
- Hyatt Hotels (1957-1958 Recession) ...
- Microsoft (1973-1975 Recession) ...
- Mailchimp (2001 & 2009 Recession)
- Airbnb (2007-2009 Recession)
- Disney (1929 – Great Depression)

As Mark Twain says, “Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.”

■ **You both have extensive experience in the marketing industry. What sort of experience will each of you be bringing to Marketing Grit?**

Throughout my career, I've had in-depth exposure to senior strategic thinking across a wide range of industries (from casinos and hotels to movie theatres and restaurants). My strength lies in not only big picture thinking, but in being able to quickly identify problems or challenges as well as opportunities and then being able to bridge the gap by providing a clear path to address them.

Debbie is no slouch to strategy either – having operated at a senior level at Tsogo Sun and more recently as CEO of The TOPS at SPAR Wine Show. Where Debbie shines however is that she ‘gets things done’ – on time, on budget and of the requisite standard. She is a hard taskmaster who gets the entire team aligned in meeting (and exceeding) client expectations.

■ ***What excites you most about launching Marketing Grit?***

Without a doubt, it's to make a difference and mean something – to us, our team, our suppliers, partners, and clients. Giving birth to something is as exciting as it is scary – but we both believe that this ‘baby’ is going to grow up into a remarkable, recognisable, and respected force within the consulting and agency landscape.

■ ***Marketing is such a powerful tool, especially if you're running a small business. What can business owners no longer ignore when it comes to marketing?***

Covid has not only accelerated the digitisation of customer interactions by years, but the share of companies that are partially or fully digitised has almost doubled in less than five years. This shows that not only are consumers consumption patterns changing, but companies are adapting quickly to these trends.

Businesses can no longer just assume that having an online presence is enough. They need to consider what, given the pandemic and all that goes with that (dynamic consumption patterns and trends) - does your business need to do to compete and thrive. Is it a shift in business model – maybe a new market or some form of vertical or even horizontal integration? What are your competitors doing – what is the market telling you.

■ ***How important is it for brands to tell stories that resonate with consumers?***

It is critical – storytelling enables marketers to develop a deeper, more meaningful connection with their audience, it allows brands to stand out, be memorable, more relatable, authentic, and less “salesy”. Storytelling, particularly on social media also creates engagement and helps builds trust.

■ ***Lastly, Covid-19 has shaken things up. What sort of marketing trends can we see in 2021?***

- Consumer consumption patterns have shifted to be a lot more ‘digital’ centric – which will continue the increased demand for home/office delivery – quicker, cheaper, faster.
- The new ‘normal’ will likely end up with many organisations offering a ‘hybrid’ working model (part remote and part office) – thereby enabling businesses to have a smaller office footprint with hot-desks or even co-working spaces.
- For the individual – this means less travel, less time in traffic and more time at home. Already we are seeing many people semi-grating to coastal or other lifestyle areas, an increase in home improvements purchases etc.
- Coffee shops will become an extension of your home office (just to get out, see other human beings and have a change of scenery) – so store layout, Wi-Fi etc will be a big attractor.
- Digital advertising will continue to grow – it will be interesting to see how small and big brands (with big budgets) co-exist on the various platforms. Likely – brands who are innovative and authentic will win the day – it is “social ‘media after all.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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