

Serisha Pillay, senior marketing manager at Sage

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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As part of our ongoing #BehindtheBrandManager series, we interviewed some of the Marketing Achievement Awards' Rising Star finalists - said to be the best and the brightest under the age of 35 who have consistently demonstrated excellent performance and who have the potential to become outstanding leaders in their profession.



Serisha Pillay

Pillay has spent five years in marketing, formulating brand strategies, managing internal and external stakeholder relationships (locally and internationally), and overseeing integrated marketing projects and campaigns.

In her role as marketing manager at Sage, she explores new and challenging environments to make brand communications increasingly customer centric, visually appealing and personalised for the end-user through powerful storytelling and data-driven insights.

Here, she tells us what the win means to her and what it took to get to where she is today...

■ ***You recently won the MAA's Rising Star of the Year Award. Firstly, congrats, and secondly, tell us what this recognition means to you?***

Thank you so much.

Winning the Marketing Achievement Awards (MAA's) Rising Star of the Year has been an incredibly humbling, exciting and emotional experience. It's honestly more than just an award for me – it has confirmed my belief in the importance of manifesting your dreams, believing in yourself and never letting difficult or challenging circumstances define you.

I grew up with my mom running the household as a single parent, like so many others. I always knew that I had to work harder than anyone else to find some way to help. I sacrificed my social life and my supposedly 'fun younger 20s' to focus on my studies, stood in queues for hours on end each year to get approved for NSFAS loans and bursaries, and even worked three part-time jobs to put myself through University.

It didn't stop there, because even after getting an opportunity to officially join the world of work as an intern, I needed to prove myself, so I worked even harder pouring my heart and soul into each project. It's definitely easier when you love what you do.

Each moment, each sacrifice and each prayer culminated to this moment that has proved that hard work pays off. You just can't give up on your dreams or yourself. So, this award is not just for me – it's for my mom, for my family, for everyone that's had to pick themselves up, dust themselves off and keep moving forward.

■ ***Tell us about your career: what you studied and why, and how you ended up where you are today?***

I was excited to pursue a career in events management because it brought together my passion for business and problem solving and it allowed me to be creative. However, there were no universities at the time that offered events management as a degree, so I decided to study BCom Communication Management at the University of Pretoria. For the first two years, I questioned my decision but by my third year, I completely fell in love with the power of tailored communication in business.

Four months after graduating Cum Laude in both my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (Honours in BCom Communication Management) and being recognised as the top student, I started my career as an intern within the Discovery Vitality Marketing team.

Starting as an intern with no prior experience – especially in marketing – I was keen to learn and explore every opportunity

and challenge. I loved every minute and quickly managed to learn multiple skills and expand my knowledge, while working on exciting and challenging campaigns and product launches.

I moved from intern to marketing assistant, communication consultant, brand manager and then senior brand manager within a short space of time (about five years) while earning prestigious internal awards along the way.

Now, I get the opportunity to start my next great marketing adventure at Sage, where I can explore the B2B world while learning about a completely new industry, which I am incredibly excited about!

■ ***What are you most excited about as a marketing manager in the technology industry, specifically the SaaS (Software as a Service) sector?***

It goes without saying that advances in technology is crucial to economic growth. I believe it's a doorway to a future of endless possibility, new opportunity and extraordinary success.

As a marketing manager within the SaaS industry, I get the opportunity to transform the way people think and work, so that their organisation's can thrive regardless of the challenges faced, especially as a result of the current pandemic.

Through innovative marketing efforts, I can take customers on a journey through personalised experiences at every communication touchpoint and at every phase of the customer lifecycle, from awareness to acquisition and retention, while creating shared value for all stakeholders and building long-term relationships with them.

■ ***Tell us more about your new role and what it entails?***

My role involves creating tailored communication and marketing campaigns for Sage through powerful and impactful storytelling. Technically, this means developing and implementing integrated, strategically aligned marketing solutions based on data-driven insights. As a marketing manager, I must offer specialist marketing advice to stakeholders and oversee marketing projects and campaigns from conception to completion to drive awareness, engagement and sales, while coaching and leading the teams that support me.

■ ***Growing up, what did you want to be?***

So many things! I had a multitude of career paths that I wanted to follow – from being a somatologist, to an events planner, businesswoman, entrepreneur and even a United Nations ambassador (the last three are still on my to-do list!). Looking back, I realise that I just wanted to brainstorm ground-breaking ideas and find a way to bring it to life while still helping people.

■ ***What career advice would you give to aspiring young marketing and branding professionals?***

1. Always have a positive mindset and practice gratitude.
2. Find a balance between data-driven insights and creativity when planning and executing marketing activities. It's integral to creating emotional connections with consumers.
3. Believe in yourself.
4. Work hard and take the initiative – don't be afraid to put your hand up.
5. Be kind and compassionate.
6. Reflect on each project and celebrate the wins; small or big – it all counts!

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

Jess is Senior Editor: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com. She is also a contributing writer. marketingnews@bizcommunity.com

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