

Susie Hart, The Unlimited's head of brand

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Financial services company, The Unlimited, is a family-owned business with a suite of products that range from health to motor and legal to death cover, taking care of more than three million South Africans. Now, after some 25 years of being a price and product-driven business, the business has made a deliberate strategic decision to become brand-led.



Supplied. Susie Hart, head of brand, the Unlimited

“We’re not entrenched in any one category or industry, which gives us the latitude to bring the most relevant and best possible value to our customers in whatever form that takes,” says Susie Hart, Unlimited's head of brand says.

In August, the brand will, for the first time, launch an Above-The-Line (ATL) campaign with a TVC produced by Joe Public. Hart says the campaign is a great example of just how differently the brand does things.

What is unique about The Unlimited in terms of branding?

I think it’s our unwavering brand belief that business should do better and our willingness to take a real stand on this, regardless of how uncomfortable that can be at times. Whilst for many businesses that sort of belief would make for a very good statement on a boardroom wall, The Unlimited takes it to the extreme.

Our massive transformative purpose (MTP) is shifting lives and there’s no tolerance for incremental change, CSI box-ticking

or small thinking. This is about bold thinking and radical progress, and it's reflected in the tangible delivery that is already making a big impact in our country.

I've never worked with a brand more willing to stick its neck out and disrupt the status quo for anything that supports our purpose. We've been known to ruffle feathers, but man do we get stuff done!

■ ***Tell us more about the ATL campaign produced by Joe Public that will flight on SABC in August.***

We worked closely with the Joe Public team, and the concept they came up with was, not only creatively unique but also incredibly aligned to the way we do business.

I'd estimate that we could have produced the TVC for at least a couple of million rands less if we'd followed the traditional route of working with a single production house, a single director, and a small cast. We chose not to do that.

The agency came up with an ad concept that's based on our manifesto (the story of Unlimited). It's a stake in the ground on who we are as a business and how we see the world.

What excited us most about their idea for the campaign, was the unconventional creative approach. Teaming up with 21 collaborators and 15 different directors, each given a line from the manifesto, and a platform to share their individual stories on what "unlimited" meant to them. Outside of spreading the opportunity more broadly (and we're all about that), the campaign is made up of content that reflects the rich tapestry of diversity in the most South African way possible! The result is extraordinary.

The brief to Joe Public was to create a campaign that cut through the clutter and we think they delivered on this.

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

I see two key parts to my role. The first is around custodianship - keeping our brand safe - making sure that we deliver consistently through every one of our values and with the customer right at the heart of everything we do.

Secondly, it's about pushing our brand to places it's never been before, such as our ATL with a 360-degree campaign - an exciting first for us!

Our vision is one of a 100-year business, so more than that, it's about deeply entrenching a brand-led way of thinking across the company - thinking that considers our customers and our massive transformative purpose in everything we do.

It sounds simple enough, but it's a complete departure from how most businesses operate and one that requires some brave action!

■ ***What has been the biggest challenge(s) in your role?***

I think the biggest challenge has been around the change management we've been undergoing as a company for the last 18 months. That level of change takes real commitment, discipline, and time.

And whilst there's no question that our people are 100% galvanised behind this change, there's work to be done in terms of deeply understanding how that translates across the various parts of our business. As challenges go, it's a pretty exciting one!

There's a sign at the entrance of our building that reads "Unshackle yourself from what you know", and more than a collection of words, it's a genuine call (if not demand) for people in the business to do just that. To open themselves to seeing the world through a different lens and thinking in a different way.

After more than 20 years in the communication industry, that's a real challenge for me every day, but it's one that's grown

me as a marketer and as a leader, in ways, I couldn't have imagined!

▣ ***What keeps you going every day?***

Lots! The people are a highlight of every day. I consulted for the business before taking up my role in the brand team, and the people were the single biggest driver for me joining the company full-time.

The unbelievable level of investment in personal development and leadership is an ongoing highlight. There's a genuine belief that everything rises and falls on leadership and a view that your journey to becoming a better leader is never done.

I don't think there's been a day in the business that hasn't stretched me way beyond my comfort zone, and I love that! Terrifying, inspiring, and exhilarating in equal measures – that just about sums up a day in the office!

And then, another real highlight is the collaboration with our strategic partners in putting this campaign together. We have an incredible relationship with Joe Public that's based on far more than creative delivery. There are shared values and a common commitment to doing good in the world, and that's made for a great meeting of minds. I think the creative output is a strong testament to this.

▣ ***Did you always want to end up where you are now?***

I'm an entrepreneur at heart and that's strongly reflected in my career journey. Starting with shares in a magazine, co-founding and running a design studio for 18 years, I've also co-owned a restaurant and art gallery and I've dabbled a little in publishing too.

I have a deep love of the creative process, a real curiosity for business, and a strong desire for meaning in the work I do. I've also worked in a corporate environment long enough to know that it's not for me (and equally that I'm a fairly terrible employee!).

Purpose matters deeply to me, and The Unlimited has a massive transformative purpose that drives every decision made. So, to love what I do in an entrepreneurial environment, and to work in a business that not only talks purpose but delivers on it daily in a tangible, measurable and meaningful way, that's about as good as it gets for me.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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