

Yazeed Osman, CMO at Valenture Institute and UCT Online High School

 By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

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It has been a year since the University of Cape Town (UCT) announced its plan to open an online high school, and we decided to catch up with Yazeed Osman, the marketing lead behind Valenture Institute, which is responsible for launching the school.



Image Supplied: Yazeed Osman

With over 10 years of marketing experience at companies such as Takealot, Clicks, Best Buy, News24 and Get Smarter, Osman is still gearing up for more.

What interested you in the marketing field?

To be honest, I've always been an individual who looks to showcase creativity. As a teenager growing up in the US in the early 2000s, I was quick to adapt to new platforms, create an audience and showcase my and others' talents and creativity. Additionally, another strong pillar of mine is performance — whether it was on the track, on the field, or at school, I'd always strive to iterate on my results.

This foundation aligns very well with the characteristics needed to be a successful marketer, and as such, has become the new canvas on which I get to showcase ideas and creativity to drive increased performance. Initially, I studied mechanical engineering but found myself constantly looking to build business plans and marketing strategies for the various ideas I had in mind. Ultimately this led to me completing my degree in business management.

At first, when I entered the working world, I was unsure of whether or not I had made the right decision — until I found my comfort in building out behavioural marketing strategies. Soon after, I was headhunted by Takealot to implement their direct marketing strategy, and I knew I had found my calling.

■ ***It has been a year since your appointment, what have you done during this time?***

Has it only been a year? The past year has been absolutely exhilarating. When we started out last year, the marketing team only consisted of a few individuals, faced with the mammoth task of securing 5,000 high school learners.

We hit the ground running, and some key achievements include:

- Implementing a fully automated application nurturing funnel.
- Opening UCT Online High School's doors in January 2022 with 5,000 high school learners. We only launched the offering in July 2021, so this was a major achievement in terms of learner uptake in just 5 months.
- Creating the first-ever, official school song featuring some of SA's biggest artists called *we own the future* for UCT Online High School.
- Partnering with Sanlam to create the Sanlam UCT Online High School Scholarship programme for 100 financially-disadvantaged learners across South Africa.
- UCT Online High School and Valentre Institute feature at a major Springboks Rugby match in 2022.
- Valentre Institute was chosen as one of SAs Top 5 Most Exciting Startups for 2021 by Heavy Chef.
- Creating an eCommerce store to supply learners with official merchandise.
- We joined forces with Grade Africa, a local clothing brand, to create a one-of-a-kind merch collab, which was launched at our Youth Day Celebration at the V&A Waterfront's Batter Park on 16 June. This is also currently featured on *Global Citizen* as one of their rewards offerings.

- Launching the most affordable Cambridge International curriculum in Africa through UCT Online High School.
- Launching an adult matric programme through UCT Online High School.



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Throughout this time, I was also focused on building out our marketing team. To date, the team has grown, becoming a fully-fledged marketing division with over 30 employees. None of this would have been possible without them.

■ ***Why do you think people are interested in an online high school?***

An online high school really affords guardians the freedom of controlling the environment their children are exposed to. As high school is such a preparatory part of life, it is important that learners are equipped with the necessary skills to take them forward and have the barriers removed that could hinder progression.

Access to quality education is also a big driver of interest when it comes to online high school. For learners in outlying areas, they are often faced with a lack of options when it comes to choosing a high school and are more often than not, unable to go to areas with better schools. Things such as school shoes and uniforms are no longer needed.

■ ***What are the challenges in your role?***

Well, marketing really is about numbers, isn't it? When it comes to marketing UCT Online High School, our challenges are mostly around finding the balance between product-market fit and customer-product fit. Launching with 5,000 learners in January 2022 was concrete testament to the fact that we had launched a product that really fit in well with our target market. However, as we look to expand our learner base into 2023, we need to take the learnings of 2022 into account.

One of these is quite simply that not everyone is currently equipped for online secondary schooling. From an acquisition point of view, our price points are highly competitive, and bring interest from all areas of South Africa — unfortunately, in a lot of areas within our country the infrastructure to support online learning is also not established. Additionally, our marketing is two-fold — marketing to both guardians and learners. While guardians want to understand more of the curriculum and delivery details, learners ultimately need to adapt to the school culture.

■ ***What do you enjoy most about your role?***

The fact that we are on a mission. Again, while marketing is all about the numbers, the fact of the matter is that we are changing lives. Whenever I see new applications being approved, I think about the emotion running through that household and the excitement of things to come.



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■ ***What is the biggest skill you bring into your role?***

The biggest skill I bring to the role has to be my ability to translate numbers into creative thinking. Marketing education can, at times, be quite challenging as it is such a pivotal decision to make in a child's life, which means that we need to focus on more than just "putting bums on seats".

As I previously had a lot of exposure to a wide range of industries, I am often able to identify opportunities to create synergies with various industries that will allow for a wider distribution of marketing messaging.

▀ ***What is your plan for the future?***

As we move into the future and grow our learner base into new territories, I really want to ensure that our learners have a positive experience and ultimately become our brand ambassadors allowing us to turn the school into a household brand. This will be achieved by focusing not just on the curriculum itself, but also on the extracurricular activities. This includes activities such as sports and gaming, to having events for our learners where they can interact and engage with one another. I feel there is a big opportunity for synergy here with key partnerships.

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

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