

Nedbank IMC speaker Mike Sharman



By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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[Mike Sharman](#) is a serial entrepreneur, perhaps best known as the founder of Retroviral, which has made more brands go viral, globally than any other agency in Africa, such as his work for Kreepy Krauly on 'My Kreepy Teacher' and Nando's 'Last Dictator Standing'. He also co-founded Retroactive, MatchKit.co, Webfluential.com and Put Foot Foundation.

He was named one of the *Mail & Guardian's* top 200 young (under 35) South Africans in 2013.



Mike Sharran

Here, we find out more about what's really behind his mask...

📌 **Mike, comment on your involvement in this year's Nedbank IMC?**

I'm a speaker, with a focus on our 2020 smash hit, triple Creative Circle Gold winner, 'My Creepy Teacher'.



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■ ***The topic of your talk is 'From zero to viral in 96 hours. Learnings from an Octopus Teacher.' What are some key talking points you plan to discuss?***

At Retroviral, we have made more brands go viral globally than any other agency in Africa. Virality for us is 'eyeballs + actions' = sales, leads, conversions; some form of activity that supports our client business objectives.

The IMC keynote is dedicated to the insights behind 'concept to virality in 96 hours'. The event is movie themed and it's perfectly aligned with my topic based on the continued successes of the BAFTA-, SAFTA-, Oscar-winning *My Octopus Teacher*.

■ ***What are you looking forward to with regard to the event?***

Quasi-remote, but being back on a physical stage is the part of the Nedbank IMC that fuels my presenter fires. The stage is sensational and the audience is set for some of the brightest international marketing minds. This event is a highlight of the integrated marketing calendar.

■ ***Tell us about your role as co-founder of Retroviral?***

Almost 11 years in and each year it becomes more inspiring, from the people I work with to the brand challenges thrown our way. Retroviral will always be my first startup love and it keeps me honest and my creative ego in check. It has been built to focus on our boutique offering never being the biggest, but rather the best. According to last quarter's Creative Circle rankings we are currently the seventh-best agency in the country and that's an insanely proud achievement for me.

■ ***You also co-founded Retroactive, MatchKit.co, Webfluentia.com and Put Foot Foundation. Tell us more about these companies/initiatives and your current involvement in them.***

How much time do you have? Seriously, I'm a serial entrepreneur and dot connector. Each of these businesses are at different life stages and maturity.

Put Foot Foundation is where I atone for my sins and do good. We raise money to fit primary school children in rural SADC communities with school shoes, and communicate to these kids that they matter, regardless of what other people in their lives tell them.

Webfluentia, a marketplace platform that connects brands with influencers, is a truly global business and was my first foray into product over service. I'm not operational at this business as it is ably led by a team of very smart minds. Tens of thousands of influencers; close to 2bn reach at any given time.

MatchKit.co is borne out of Retroviral's sister agency, Retroactive (double Young Agency of the Year at the Sport Industry Awards) and has been named Startup of the Year by Heavy Chef, won Gold awards at the Mobile Marketing Association for being the App of the Year, and most recently received top honours from RMI's accelerator programme - Alpha Code Incubate - with another R500K grant fund injection.

I'm fortunate enough to work with some of the most talented people in the world, not just in South Africa, and across the various interests, we are forging paths unlike anyone else before us.

🔴 ***Tell us more about your experience and/or any career highlights to date.***

I like to create tomorrow what didn't exist today. I've been fortunate enough to disrupt, build brands, win some of the most coveted global awards in my industry and scratch multiple creative itches. I'm also incredibly lucky to be able to focus and distill information across a seemingly chaotic list of interests.

🔴 ***How has the pandemic and subsequent national lockdowns affected Retroviral specifically and your work?***

We've had some losses, but it helps that we've been a cloud-driven creative agency since 2015, so we adapted a lot quicker than most. Most of our clients are digital-led, whereas we are nimble and were able to adapt exceptionally quickly to chaos. Sure, we had some losses, but fortunately the net result has been positive for our agency. I am incredibly grateful for our clients who have stuck with us and believed in our vision during the period of societal pandemic paralysis.

🔴 ***What's really behind your mask – literally and figuratively speaking?***

Literally, my trademark bum-chin and figuratively, my IRL personality is what you see with my social media personality. I'm not everyone's cup of tea; I'm a challenger brand, and I resonate with challenger brands.

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

A lawyer, an actor. Since acting in SA is incongruous with paying bonds and medical aid, I opted for another route with tertiary education safety.

🔴 ***What did you study, where did you expect your career to take you and how does this measure up to your current reality?***

I graduated from BA Marketing Communications from RAU early 2005, then headed off to the States to pursue a foray in

acting, wrote a play, produced and financed it, profits were ploughed back into the production to take it to Grahamstown. I landed a job in PR, won a fancy dress Castle Lager Superfan competition to the UK, worked in London for two years, became a social media early adopter in 2008, and when I officially launched Retroviral in 2010, I began carving out aspects of a job that I really wanted. Here I am 11 years later and I'm still hunting my elusive Oscar. It's inevitable... maybe for documentary filmmaking ;)

🔴 **What do you love most about the creative industry?**

The characters. We have the most colourful human beings in the world. I love creatives. And the stories.

🔴 **What's your typical workday routine?**

The only thing typical about my day is dropping my kids off at school before 8am. The rest of the day: Digital Jesus take the wheel!

🔴 **When you're not busy working, what do you do? How do you socialise these days?**

I obsess over ideas, consume content, engage in social media and I "dad"! I love my kids and watching them learn and grow. They give me hope that the planet is better off with future generations; if not, there's always Mars, hey Elon!

🔴 **What are you reading/listening to/watching at the moment?**

I just finished reading *Shoe Dog*, have Paul Van Doren's memoir about Vans on my list of next reads. I love founder biographies. I'm watching *Your Honour* and trying to finish off my new book, *Brandalism* (coming soon).

🔴 **What's the first thing you plan to do when things go back to normal?**

What normal? Also, all the travel. Lusting over *Wanderlust*.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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