

New north, new narratives and nation building

Watch now as Abey Mokuwatsane, managing executive at Vodacom SA and Africa and Preetesh Sewraj, CEO of the Loeries add their voices to how together SA business and the creative communications sectors are creating a new "better normal" in the 7th episode of Bizcommunity's video interview series, made possible by the ACA, Association for Communications and Advertising, hosted by Rutendo Nyamuda.

This interview is also available on [YouTube](#), and at [BizTakeouts](#), via downloadable [App](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#) and [IONO.FM](#).

The series is aimed at unpacking the economics and contribution of advertising to business in a post-Covid economy. Here, some powerful insights from Mokuwatsane and Sewraj, showing how South Africa's creative communications industries are continuing to take the lead in futureproofing economies...

Inclusivity and diversity

Commenting on whether brands should confront getting involved in issues such as the most recent Black Lives Matter movement, Mokuwatsane is of the opinion that you should already have a pre-determined view on how you're going to engage with such macro topics. "I think that the brand's world is always going to be everchanging and I think that brands need to take a principled position around where they stand and who they are and what their perspective is so that no matter what comes your way you're able to respond authentically from a position that you've already held that you've already debated internally and you have already potentially even invested behind so that it's not a new thing.

“The Black Lives Matter issue blew up around the world and it has been going on for a very long time but it peaked recently and Vodafone sent out a statement around the fact that they support diversity and really solid statements in terms of their position but they were able to say these are the campaigns and the initiatives that they’ve embarked on to ensure that there’s diversity. In South Africa in particular, we as Vodacom are a B-BBEE 1 contributor, so there isn’t much more you need to tell people in terms of your support for Black Lives Matter if you can prove it in your balance sheet, in your investments, in your hiring practices, in the way that you communicate, that you support it as part and parcel of how you operate.”

Sewraj adds that if you’re operating within diverse societies, you need diverse leadership in order to have messaging and business strategy that resonates with a diverse audience. “If you’re not bringing in diverse voices and different people with different experiences, then you’re alienating a huge segment of society.”

Commenting on how the communications sectors are helping clients breathe life into their purpose through their messaging, Mokgwatsane believes the trickiest thing clients and agencies have to get right is to set the creative guardrails that allow everyone to create efficiently. “There’s a lot of wheelspin in this interchange between the brief and eventually what work comes out, and we found that we’ve been able to save a lot of time by being very clear around what our true north is with our agencies.”

Sewraj is seeing an interesting dynamic, here, between brand and agency. “In the agency ecosystem, I think one of the nicest things I see, it’s one of the most diverse groups of people. They hire very diverse thinkers, into the ecosystem to be able to come and bring lots of new ideas... And because of that, one of the things that I’m finding is that the agencies challenge the brands quite a bit to think differently and go in different directions as well and because of that, that partnership results in communication and messaging out there that really supports society at large, supports really diverse thinking and diverse communication.”

The impact of technological innovation

Mokgwatsane says to always go back to the source when looking to innovate. “What is your source code? The innovation pipeline is exactly the same in the creative pipeline. It’s just another way the company is presenting and producing products and services to meet a particular demand. It’s exactly the same as creating a piece of communication.”

He says that when they’ve been clear in defining their purpose and communicating that, it’s unlocked the best talent within their business and that from a technological perspective they’ve innovated products and services that are aligned to their purpose. One of these platforms is called Vodacom e-School where they’ve been able to get the entire public school syllabus onto a platform that is freely accessible to anyone on the Vodacom network, from Grade R to Grade 12. And they already have about 1.4m people on this particular platform, he says. “This was an innovation that came from the tech team because they needed to build a platform that would help South Africans connect to a better future.

“Even when things return to what we hope is a ‘better normal’, I think these new platforms and technologies that we’ve been able to identify are going to stay with us in some sort of new way but we’re never going to go back to how things used to be,” he adds.

Speaking of the new or ‘better’ normal, he says that the majority of his team, who have not been into the office since mid-

March, are probably working longer hours and that we're all much more productive than we used to be... However, we need to maintain or re-establish a work-life balance. "One of our legal representatives at work said: 'We're not working from home, we live at work'.

“ I think we should be very careful not to let this newkind of freedom that we find, creep so much into our home environment that we can no longer drawthe distinction. ”

The responsibility of business in society

In conclusion, Mokgwatsane believes that it's the responsibility of multinationals to create a better world for society and that we'll see more and more companies taking on this dual responsibility in addition to creating profit for their shareholders.

"The original paper on shared value was actually written in the 90s and the whole premise is that there's no way the whole world is going to be sustainable if business doesn't create societal wealth at the same time as it creates shareholder wealth and that business case has been proven time and time again, because customers are choosing to partner with companies and support companies that support society."

“ My core belief is that business has the best chance of changing the world than any other function, more than political parties, more than religious groupings, more than governments, it's business that is going to make the biggest difference because that is what funds progress, and if we can find a model that is able to balance profits and making the world a better place I think we'll find something that is a lever of progress for us that works. ”

Adding to this, Sewraj says that creativity makes good business sense as well... "One of the things we shouldn't allow this pandemic to do is stop the creative experience of the human expression that we have, and if we can keep working towards that then what we're going to find is that we'll come out stronger than if it never happened at all."

For more of Mokgwatsane and Sewraj's learnings and insights, [watch](#) the full interview.

This industry-wide initiative for conversations around sustainable solutions to common issues facing SA's marketers and marketers, to future proof the industry, is made possible by the Association for Communication and Advertising.

Join the ACA at www.acasa.co.za | www.bizcommunity.com/ACACaresCovid19.

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