

Key insights and reflections  
from the conference themed:

# MARKETING. UPCLOSE & PERSONAL



NAMING SPONSOR

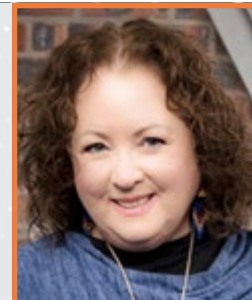
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## CONFERENCE PAPER Nedbank IMC 2023

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# INTRODUCTION

Meltwater, the global leader in social and media intelligence, is honoured once again to present the Nedbank IMC 2023 Conference white paper.

The Nedbank IMC had a total of 3.56k mentions across news and social channels this year, with engagement numbers of 6.11k and an estimated reach across Twitter of 5.9m.

The theme of this year's conference, "Marketing. Up Close and Personal." was apt, with 2023 being the first Nedbank IMC to host in-person guests in four years. The conference theme highlighted the need for marketers to get to know and better understand their customers. As illustrated by the CEO of the IMC, Dale Hefer: "Today's customers continue to grow in sophistication and complexity. Not knowing your customers can have a material impact on brands."

This underpins the methodology applied at Meltwater of utilising data-driven customer insights. A better understanding of what a brand's customers are posting online enables you to grasp key opportunities immediately, recognise branding blind spots, identify a crisis before it happens and alter customer sentiment.

One of the best and most effective ways to achieve this is by using social and media intelligence tools such as Meltwater. Meltwater allows brands to stay on top of trends relevant to them and build a business based on direct customer feedback.

Get UpClose&Personal with our industry leading services that will enable you to discover how to capture the mentions that matter and uncover the insights you've been missing, **YOU CAN CONTACT US HERE.**

Introduction by  
 **Meltwater**



**KATHERINE MCINNES**  
Head of Marketing Africa



The conference theme of **Marketing: UpClose&Personal** saw a range of relevant topics presented by over 20 thought leaders. The hybrid event on 15 September 2023 drew over 2300 delegates, 800 of those joining in-person in Johannesburg.



The diverse content has been consolidated by the authors into the six categories of:

**HEART | TRUTH | MAGIC  
CONNECT | COURAGE | CREATE**



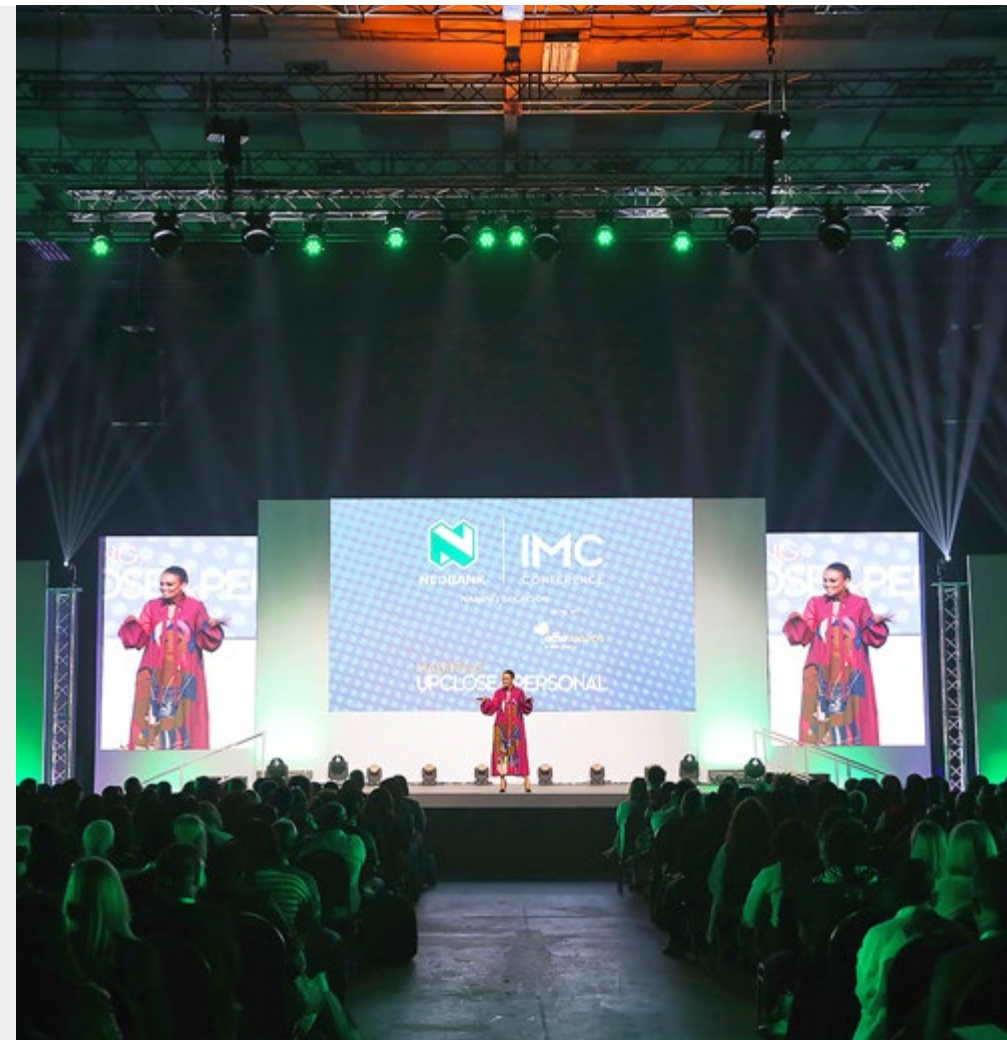
# CONTENTS

- 1. CREATE** – Reshape the creative process. Care, collaboration, connection, simplicity and reinvention drive creative campaigns where AI will augment principled creative process.
- 2. CONNECT** – A multiplayer universe is loading. Brands will embed themselves in the multiplayer universe which reflects the evolution of social media.
- 3. MAGIC** – Harness the magic in Africa. We need to harness our unique worldview and talent to create dominant, truly African global brands. This is the African Century and AI can get us there.
- 4. COURAGE** – Marketers must reinvent themselves to remain relevant in a world where change is accelerating, and consumers need brands to help heal the world.
- 5. TRUTH** – Talk to your truth. In a world where deep fakes can be created by AI and fake bots dominate the socialverse, influencers and brands need to be truth tellers.
- 6. HEART** – Being human is a gift. Embrace the gift of being human as artificial intelligence emerges as a gamechanger this decade.



Everyone's talking about AI. Or are they? Given that an AI-generated character, exotically named Celestine, opened the Nedbank-IMC Conference on 15 September 2023, you would have been forgiven for thinking that there would be a deep dive by most of the expert speakers into artificial intelligence and how it has disrupted marketing strategy this year. Instead, it was all about the truth and magic and courage and creativity found, and still needed in marketing, all wrapped up in inspirational storytelling.

We were reminded of how marketers play a role not only in our skilled persuasion, but through our ability, responsibility and even mandate to contribute to our community. South Africa remains among the gems of the continent, filled with creative marketers that paint the canvas we work on every day. This year, the assurance from the speakers was beyond doubt - we matter, what we do is valuable, and we have a role to craft more creative strategies to project our brands and even our country (and communities) to achieve more, together, as a collective.



### CREATE – Reshape the creative process.

Let's get some fun back in our industry! Keynote speaker, **Nick Law**, Creative Chairperson, Accenture Song (New York), told delegates to be audacious, prioritise taste and be intentional so their messaging was not lost in the morass of content out there. He stressed how important it is that creativity keeps up with how technology is driving consumer action to make sure beautiful creativity still inspires and drives consumer action.

*“Creativity needs to be injected back into the full advertising funnel,”* Law emphasised as he outlined his *‘7 Principles of Creativity’*, created over his years working across influential brands on multiple continents. The success of every creative company is defined by what it believes in, whether on the client side or as a creative agency. So, the principles he shared have become a way to look at new things, and have not changed much over time:





- 1. Consistent principles, dynamic practices:** “Every company should have clear principles, or a philosophy that is used as a reference point when making decisions, both internally and externally. These principles are not just how you feel about a company, but how you act in that company.” It was less about morale and culture, and more about how you approach your practices. Everything you do signals what you care about.
- 2. Singular vision, collaborative culture:** “We all accept that to be a modern creative, you need to work with lots of different skills sets, diverse backgrounds... but if you do that without the guiding force of a singular vision, it can be chaotic.” For example, movies have one director, hence companies need to have a singular vision so you can collaborate and cut through the chaos.
- 3. Loose with ideas, tight with execution:** When you become good at execution and are comfortable in a medium, you often go straight to execution. But before going to execution, throw around a few more ideas, collaborate, ask questions of others, test your ideas.
- 4. Creative needs technology:** Law has always been curious about new technologies and reminds creatives that they have been writing scripts for broadcast media for decades – and broadcast was also a disruptive technology at the beginning. Like AI is now.



- 5. Get to deep simplicity:** Our world's complexity keeps increasing and our customers are not experts. It's a "choreography problem". The more you know about a problem, the more you understand the complexity and the trick is to get past that complexity and make it simple so that it is human. Or it is just superficial simplicity and doesn't work for customers.
- 6. Start in the middle:** We are all marketers here. The classic funnel is no longer the same, and the customer-awareness journey to action has changed, along with acceleration of technology. The problem is that those at the top of the funnel are making beautiful things no one sees, and at the bottom, they are making marketing that is ugly and everyone sees. So, there is a disconnect between creativity and performance. We need to start thinking about reshaping our industry to match how customers make decisions, as these separate silos are not working for the industry.
- 7. To make new things, remake yourself:** The creative process encompasses "the space it takes to have an idea, to realising that idea in the real world..." But with AI in the mix, we may hold an idea in our head and sculpt it with technology, as more of a "post-creative process". The key takeaway here is that the industry will have to think about different creative teams. We have spent decades with humans coming up with ideas, but we are at a point right now in this technology, where creatives will also be contributing to the new language of this AI. The value is in doing something more human, so care is important.

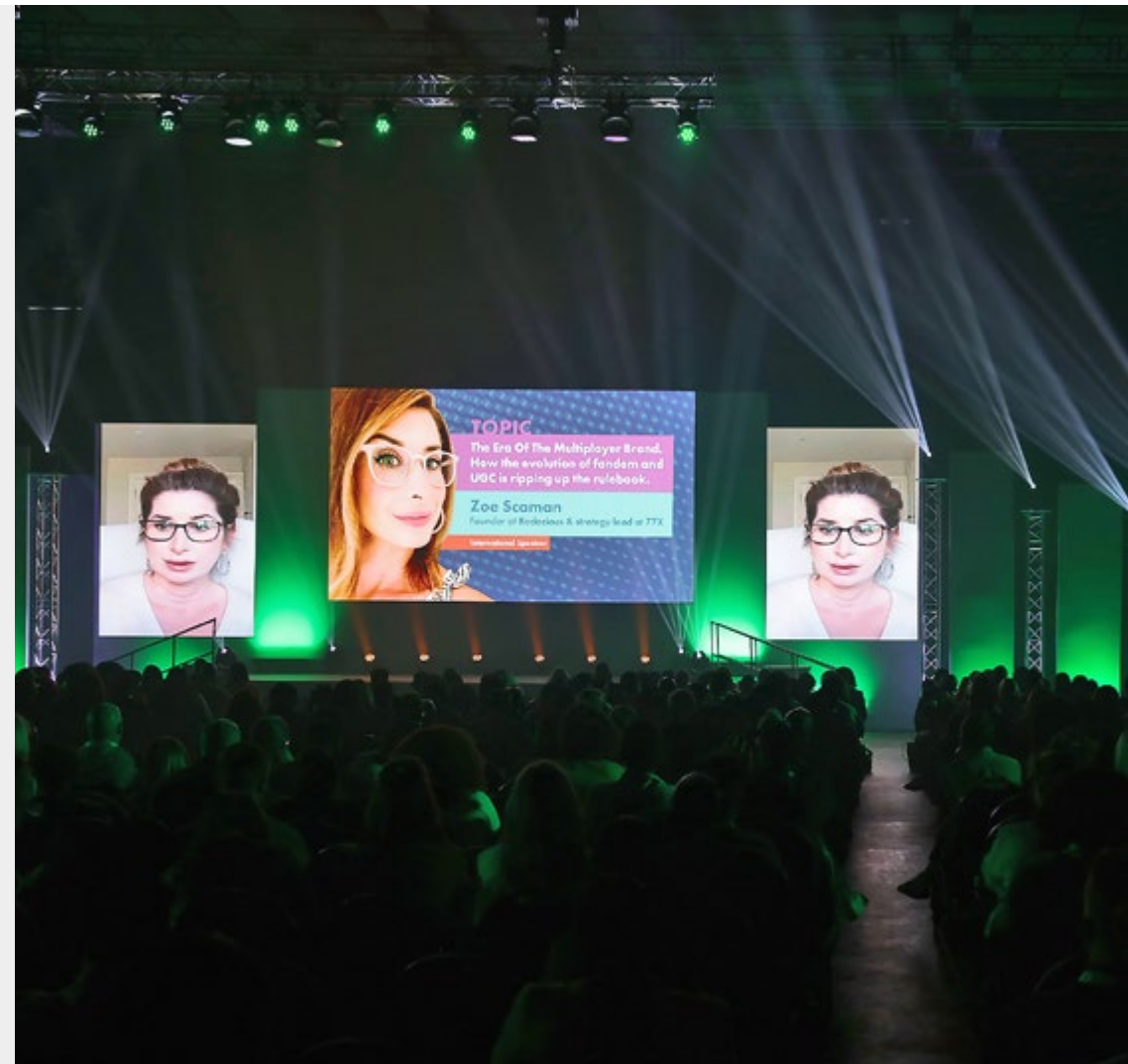
## AUTHORS' INSIGHT

“ AI should not be feared, and marketers should start to form strategies to optimise the potential that the technological advancements may provide. Creativity is about making something new, and AI provides a novel basis to enhance marketing skills. ”



## CONNECT – A Multiplayer Universe is Loading.

Social media has been a useful medium for marketing communications, but this conference brought to light that our world is about to change again with the decline of “big social”. In her presentation, **Zoe Scaman**, Founder, Bodacious, and Strategy Lead, 77X, described how *‘The Era of The Multiplayer Brand’* is upon us as social media and user generated content (UGC) evolves to create a totally new definition of brands. Scaman described in detail how brands can embrace new technologies and the era of the Multiplayer Brand, to create new experiences for consumers.



ZOE SCAMAN

While the last 20 years have seen UGC go from blogs and text to imagery and video and the entrenchment of influencer culture and the creator economy, the next phase of UGC will see the acceleration of 3D worlds, with artificial intelligence giving rise to democratised creation and the arrival of the idea of reciprocal value. This new era will be driven by the mammoth multiverse gaming worlds, such as Roblox and Fortnite, where users are already building their own worlds and games. “The days of passive consumerism are gone. We are talking about active participation in brands,” Scaman said, referencing Generation Alpha (under-13s) as wanting brands as “toolkits” they can interact with and shape. What this means is that marketers are moving to become collaborators in our world, allowing our consumers to help us shape our brands. This is the future of the multiplayer brand, with giving consumers a seat at the table to create and navigate the future for brands.

This rise of democratised creation and communities means new economic dynamics are in play, and a decentralisation of ownership with 3D. It will lead to a completely new definition of ‘brand’ and how a brand needs to act in the face of powerful change. For example, when YouTube arrived, we started thinking about video content, and with Instagram, brands built their own followings. Once again brands are being asked to evolve and create new consumer experiences to keep up with where consumers are engaging. We are on a new precipice. “Brands are blank canvases... and this is not a linear progression, this is another layer to play with and experiment with. New tools breed new behaviours.”



Scaman identified six new shifts brands must embrace fully to participate in this seminal shift in the socialverse and content creation:

- 1. The creator economy:** Born out of influencer culture and accelerated under Covid lockdowns when creators needed to connect with their communities and create monetisation strategies, which led to the rise of Discord, Patreon, and Facebook integrating new monetisation methods. But what this then did, Scaman outlined, was to fragment the internet further, as these small pockets popped up around these creators which they owned. People felt comfortable, shared love for creators and subjects, and this led to the next shift: the cosy web.
- 2. Cosy web:** We will start to see a rapid decline in “big social” (any platform capturing and selling our attention for big ad dollars), because user activity on the internet is coalescing around these communities of interest because they are safer spaces to interact with and to hang out with your own tribe. Consumers have realised it is not healthy to gather online in this so-called global town hall, where we screech at one another. “The global town hall doesn’t work. As humanity we are not meant to be together all the time. These systems are driven on rage and clicks and selling eyeballs.”
- 3. Rise of community:** Within these spaces there are dynamic energised groups of people creating fan fiction in fandoms, they are sharing new business ideas, they are giving investor advice, if that’s what you’re into. This has created a new community economy, the emergence of collective wisdom. “People want to make stuff together, build together, evolve together.” The dynamics of a community are very different, with true peer-to-peer interaction and current social media platforms are not built for this, leading to the rise of new entrants such as Mighty Networks, Geneva, Circle and Discord.

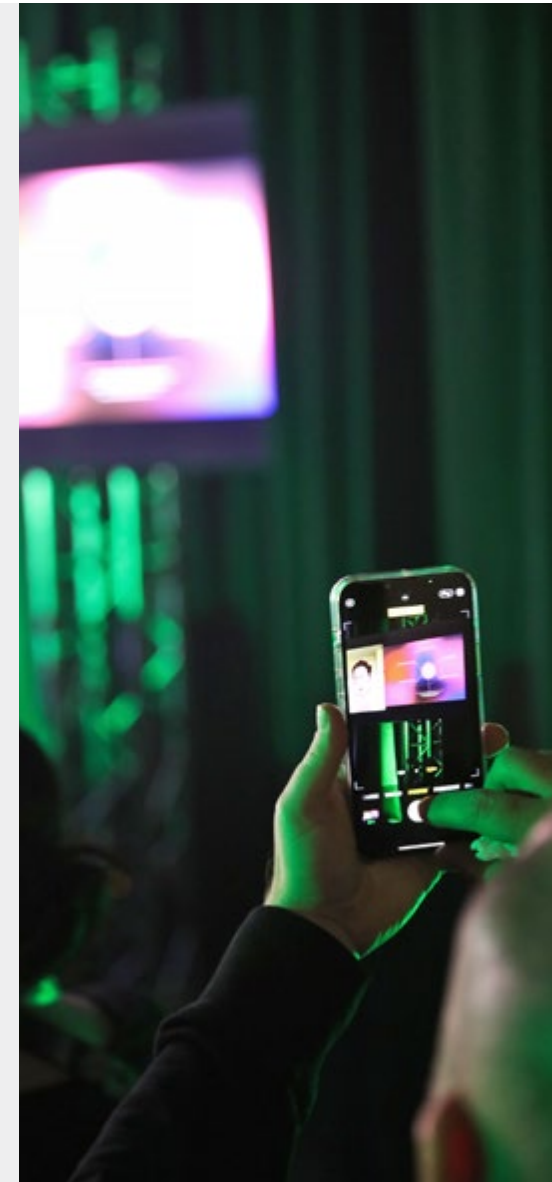


**4. Democratised creation and generative AI:** All of these things are being turbocharged by democratised creative tools. Communities don't need to know how to code, to do graphic design, how to build games, as they have all these tools to explore these brand new spaces to find out what they can do to create with, i.e., MidJourney, ChatGPT. "Many brands and ad agencies are terrified of AI coming for their jobs. We still need to be the tastemakers, but also be open to the idea that these people may want to create with them in the worlds that we are creating [as brands]."

**5. Web3 and ownership:** Scaman raised questions as to whether creators using brands to inspire and reimagine where brands could go, shouldn't be compensated for their efforts? This is the foundation of Web3 and Blockchain.

**6. Reciprocal value flow:** "We are really shit at this as agencies and brands. We make stuff, put it out there and expect them to consume it. But we don't talk about reciprocal value flow, or mutual value creation... We don't see them as fans and users... We don't invite them for feedback – we read one Instagram post." The solution is to find a way to work with our customers, users, fans, to co-navigate where our brands will go in the future.

Scaman sums up this massive shift in consumer behaviour as follows: The days of passive consumerism are gone; consumers want to shape their products and services and mould new narratives and co-create with brands. For Generation Alpha (under-13s), the very act of creation is play for future generations as Scaman's current research for Walmart has shown.



The creative process theme continued when **Laurent Marty**, Group Chief Strategic Officer, Joe Public, interviewed **Orlando Wood**, Chief Innovation Officer, System1 Group, and author of the book *Lemon*, on how today's analytical culture is coming in the way of creativity. Drawing on the story of famous director Luchino Visconti, whose work changed from epic opening film sequences characterised by a sense of flow and connection with the wider world; to films of stark symmetry and close-ups, after he had a stroke, Wood recounted how it seemed that advertising had also dramatically shifted style. This led Wood to consult a brain specialist to find out if creatives were correct in narrowing their focus, instead of allowing flow. He detailed in depth, the differences between our logical left-brain hemisphere and the rhythm of the right brain hemisphere and how this affects how we perceive the advertising messages we receive.



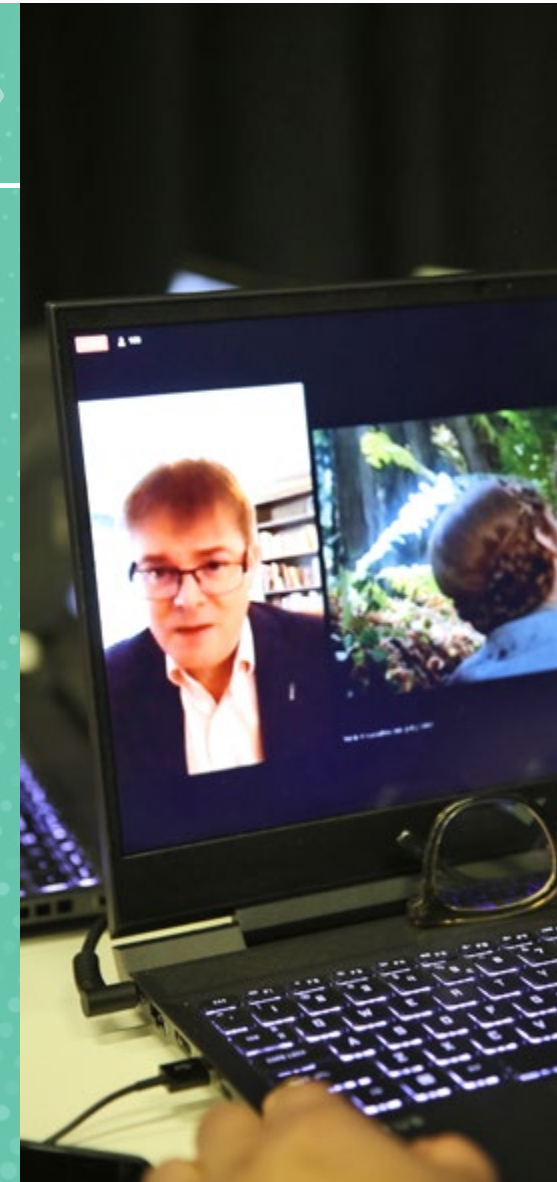
**ORLANDO WOOD AND LAURENT MARTY**

This narrow-focused attention is playing out in the world at large and in advertising. If people appear at all, they are staring directly at the camera, or there are words which tell us what to do. This is different to more personal advertising, involving people connecting with one another, with metaphor and humour. Most importantly, it is the right brained features of advertising which actually aid market share growth. However, the least effective features of advertising are dominant right now, which is undermining advertising's ability to grow brands.

Wood found that right-brain focused campaigns outperformed left-brain campaigns; and that right-brain campaigns lodge your brand in the consumer's memory bank, in a way that left-brain campaigns cannot. Brands need to get up close and personal to achieve growth.

### AUTHORS' TAKEAWAY

A seminal shift in how brands are deconstructed and repurposed by their customers for personal preference will dominate branding this decade. Consumers desire a sense of ownership and belonging in safe spaces of their own choosing. Marketing is a personal choice and brands will have to work to further understand their consumers and their new direction to navigate the "multiplayer universe".



## MAGIC – Harness the magic in Africa.

How do we liberate African creativity and give the continent an AI future? asked **Mzamo Xala**, Group CEO, Avatar, in a talk that amplified the conversation on the African brand. He sees a future for the continent with an AI that is “African Intelligent” to enable us to win with African creativity by building on African culture and creativity to create brands that consumers love. “We need to intensify our Africaness – our ability to serve the heartbeat of our dreams wherever we go, while adding the power of machine learning in the marketing mix, without losing the power of love for the African nuance.” He urged marketers to be brave, “This is the moment for African marketers. New tools are here. New behaviours are being formed. Let’s unlock our African AI creativity to unlock regional influence. We need to become AI-first. Generalist AI is now, the next is Predictive AI, and then Prescriptive Cultural AI, which is the era we want to go into.”



MZAMO XALA

**Ciko Thomas**, Group Managing Executive, Nedbank Retail and Business Banking, entreated marketers to take our diversity as a gift and appreciate our natural ability as storytellers to create uniquely South African brands. Thomas highlighted our unique service culture that borrows from the magic well that can take a great African story and make it relatable to your brand.

“We get caught up in the bad news cycle, but we need to continually lift the bonnet and look at what makes this great country work, and the wonderful magic port for great brands to make it great in the world. As custodians of brands, let us not forget our roots, commercialise what makes us unique, our African provenance.”



**CIKO THOMAS**





As marketers, it is our responsibility to create vanguard African brands that can fiercely protect our identity and still be profitable. Thomas's advocacy shows us how valuable introspection is for brands which we - the "brand custodians" - must always review. This holds even from an internal marketing perspective, for as **Mteto Nyati**, Chairman, Wazo Investments, also shared, "...if you are unable to manage yourself, why are you even thinking about managing other people?" We must know who we are and consistently share this with the world.

Top Red & Yellow student, Anganathi Beyile is coming to the end of his academic journey in pursuit of achieving a Bachelor of Commerce degree and outlined his uniquely African upbringing in a presentation that earned huge applause. He firmly questioned brands, gave insight into the new cohort of young consumers and advocated for brands that build and fulfil a better purpose through their communication and avoid virtue signalling.



**MTETO NYATI**

The collective conversations of the panel discussions channelled insightful instruction for marketers to maintain cognisance of how our perceived brand identities, thus perhaps our standing brand identities, are at risk. Control over what customers and fellow brands think of us is becoming increasingly difficult to manage. The clarity of truth is becoming questionable and the game may not even be on an equal playing field, as control is further shifting into the hands of the everyday customer.

The capacity for brands to control the perception which customers have and share amongst themselves continues to be out of our hands and information being shared is becoming less truthful. Global Africa celebrity entrepreneur **Pearl Thusi** brought this point home when she opened the conference and showed the power of truthful, authentic brands that take audacity to mould, creating unique stories particular to us.



**PEARL THUSI**

**Khensani Nobanda**, Nedbank Group Executive for Marketing and Corporate Affairs, shared '*10 Marketing Insights*' curated from the Nedbank marketing team in the pursuit of continuous learning and excellence:

**Get the basics right:** The importance of well-structured briefs being delivered and "clear communication" between marketers and clients, the need for alignment. "It seems basic yet it's essential and we need to be reminded of the basics sometimes."

**Keep growing and learning:** The potential to learn from human encounters ranging from fellow marketers in the team to clients and other stakeholders. She reminded the delegates that "we can all be life-long learners" and "the path to self-development is completely in your hands."

**Authentic storytelling builds trust:** "The key for brands to grow is through authentic storytelling." Nobanda reminded marketers of how consumers are becoming less trusting and looking to "business and companies to provide a vision." People are eager for connection with brands on a human level.

**Appeal to consumers' emotions:** The need to form an emotional connection and bond with clients allows for stronger relationships to be formed. "It's crucial to appeal to consumers' emotions, if not more than their intellect."

**Empathy with clients:** Empathy towards clients is important in building and maintaining relationships and brands should consider showing it in all parts of consumer engagement.



**KHENSANI NOBANDA**

**The power of the collective:** Nobanda emphasised the impact that collaboration can have on meeting marketing objectives and producing good work. “Collaboration across the business, across agency partners and among all team members requires unity of purpose. There is magic, absolute magic, when everyone feels invested in the outcomes.”

**Test and course correct:** There is value for marketers and their brands in “being adaptive and iterative.” Nobanda shared how adaptability has been beneficial to the Nedbank marketing team with technological advancements.

**On the ground experience:** Learning and experiences have the capacity to contribute to how marketers develop. Being on the ground and being close to the consumer experience can provide crucial insights to help direct marketing plans and enhance marketer capabilities.

**Consistency builds brands:** The importance of maintaining brand integrity, especially as brands grow, was stressed by Nobanda. Brand development needs to be done in a manner that takes contextual differences into account while safeguarding the brand identity. She shared examples of international brands that are consistent across the world, “from the signposts at the door, to the corporate identity, the African inspired decor, the famous typeface font...” Brand consistency contributes to brand trust and the bottom line.

**Sales is our duty, brand is our legacy:** Brand building takes time through the daily, short-term activities and tactics. Marketers need to keep in mind the need to work towards both the short and long term in building the brands.



**Kaleeta McDade**, Chief Experience Design Officer, VMLY&R, spoke about “Storytelling to Storyliving”, feeding right into the narrative of telling Africa’s story to the world and getting up close and personal with customers. What marketers need to do, is move from a single narrative to a story people can interact with. It’s not about funnels, “it is about making ourselves as brands, undeniable. Always be there and be meaningful,” she said. “Ideas are always in the centre, it is our purpose, what we bring to the world, our reflection, the mirror we create so people can emote with us.” To achieve this, all brand work must have a human truth, it must be relevant, and it must be interesting and useful. How do we create form and function in everything we do? Ideas must be steeped in culture. Once you have a full picture from your data, and the experiences that come out of that, brands can create pivotal moments with “beautiful collisions”, where stories are created, she advised.



McDade believes that to re-engage with consumers, brands must tap into the habits we have as humans. Referencing work with global brands, she emphasised that they create ecosystems around brands today and allow people to come in and out of that. Like Zoe Scaman, McDade also referenced communities and advised that marketers need to stop thinking linearly, ensuring there are whole worlds around their brands, creating emotional ways of connecting with every touchpoint.

*"It is a matter of life or death as to whether we embrace our entrepreneurial mindset – make sure we invest in ourselves, do things that allow us to move out of a stress role.*

*When we are in protection mode, this survivalist mindset is where we have been for some while, we cannot hope to make a difference to the lives of other people."*

### SHUKRI TOEFY

CEO, Southfields & Group CEO, Migration



SHUKRI TOEFY

## AUTHORS' TAKEAWAY

Marketers need to maintain a clear understanding of their brand values and identities in relation to the culture and humanity of the African context.

This is shifting in new AI-driven directions with untapped potential. The authenticity and humanity of the brands have the capacity to connect with customers and contribute to perceived brand image. Operating in the African market is rooted in novelty and magic. There is enormous potential for brands to draw from relatable societal norms - behaviors and tales, shared from generation to generation.



### **COURAGE** – Marketers must reinvent themselves.

But does marketing matter? This was the question asked by **Doug Place**, Chief Marketing Officer, Nando's Africa, Middle East, and South Asia, in his presentation on '*The Collective Brand*', urging marketers to connect with peers on a personal level to counter current challenges and job insecurities. Economic pressures, budget cuts, changing KPIs, data dumps, and measuring marketing ROI, have got marketers questioning whether what they do is valuable, measurable and impactful?



**DOUG PLACE**

Here are the three things to put marketers firmly back in the C-Suite where we belong:

- **Do we contribute?** Two thirds of our GDP is driven by consumption, the things people buy and consume. The economy isn't something that happens to you, it's something you do to it: in the next year, marketers will spend R60 billion on media and advertising. There are budget cuts, but the total South African Budget Deficit is half a billion Rand. That is not even 1% of what we will spend in the next year. Nothing drives the economy more than the marketers here today. So yes, you matter.
- **You have to embrace chaos:** Marketing is the only function that looks forward. Marketers must keep an eye on the horizon, run towards problems in the business, and solve consumer problems which are the foundation of value creation. Every creative act was born from chaos. What is it you are solving for someone today?
- **Collaborate!** Brand trust is a lead indicator of brand value and category value. It includes the whole supply chain, the whole circular economy. It is not enough to win; we have to win together. During the pandemic lockdown, when fast food restaurants were barred from operating in South Africa in hard lockdown, Nando's got together with competitor brands, KFC and McDonalds, and got permission from the South African Government to cook the food sitting in all their restaurants and distribute it to people going hungry, through KFC's Add Hope programme.





It takes courage to represent your profession, and your industry, not just your brand, for the collective good, to solve consumer challenges.

“What’s the difference between a marketer and an actuary? Marketers don’t think they are actuaries!” said **Andisa Ntsubane**, Managing Executive, Brand Marketing Communications Africa, Vodacom. The average tenure of a CMO is about 36 months, so a CEO with an average tenure of five years could see out two CMOs, explained **Sitho Mdlalose**, CEO, Vodacom South Africa. The team were part of a panel facilitated by **Sharon Keith**, Marketing Director, Heineken SA, on *‘Partnerships in the Business World’*. Keith shared that when she started out in the industry, marketers were often referred to as “casual labour”. The point of the discussion was to discuss how CMOs can find the “sweet spot” in their relationship with their CEOs and an alignment of goals. Ntsubane said it was important to talk about expectations upfront and the role marketing will play in the organisation, the key focus and priorities, as it is important to leave brands and organisations with better equity than when we found them.



ANDISA, SITHO AND SHARON

As a CEO, Mdlalose reiterated that it was always about the outcome of what they are trying to achieve as a business, interrogating strategy and how they want to communicate with their customers right now. Ntsubane advised that these are not easy conversations to have. “We [marketers] are good at complaining about budgets, but we are not good about explaining how we build those business cases for investment. We need to look at local and international best practices on spend. C-suite executives don’t always know what our costs are, and we need to do a good job of reducing waste.” Mdlalose shared his openness to address challenges in the business and find solutions going forward. He advised that he works towards not saying no all the time, because we must not close the door to innovative thinking.



Improving relationships between marketers and their agencies is of course key to effective marketing creative campaigns and brand innovation. In a panel discussion led by agency veteran, **Ann Nurock**, a Partner at Relationship Audits, panellists, including **Mpume Ngobese**, Co-Managing Director at Joe Public; **Nkgabiseng Motau**, Co-Founder and Chief Creative Officer at Think Creative Africa; and **Zayd Abrahams**, Chief Marketing and Strategy Officer, Tiger Brands, discussed *'Up Close & Personal or miles apart? Optimising the client/agency relationship'*. They talked about what turned relationships from transactional to trusted, as the quality of the client/agency relationship is the biggest predictor of success. It also takes enormous courage to speak your truth to your client.



## AUTHORS' TAKEAWAY

Key insights included:

- The best clients are risk takers.
- Clients should be seen as brand custodians or brand guardians.
- Agencies are joint-custodians of the brand and must take more responsibility for success.
- An immersive brief is the key to successful campaigns.
- Agencies need to understand client expectations.
- Agencies need to understand clients at different pain points.

Marketers must remember that they matter in both their businesses and within the community which we operate. The relationships formed internally and externally allow for marketers to optimise the potential to positively impact the communities we serve. It takes courage to prioritise collective good before profit and as marketers, this is a worthwhile venture for us to pursue.

*"Leadership is about serving the people we have been asked to go and lead. If you want to be relevant as a leader and get the most out of people, you have to pay attention."*

**MTETO NYATI**

Chairman, Wazo Investments



**MTETO NYATI**

## TRUTH – Talk to your truth.

Marketers and agencies may balk at the massive change ahead with the advent of AI in the mainstream, but **Luca Gallarelli**, Group CEO of TBWA\South Africa, said we should welcome in chaos, to challenge creativity. Gallarelli believes advertising agencies always used to be homes for people who didn't fit in anywhere. Coalitions of misfits whose creative genius was born out of their rejection of conformity – the truth tellers of our shadow side. The fluctuating nature of creative organisations positions them to embrace chaos and tension, which bodes well for an AI-amplified future, right now. His advice was to embrace the chaos and tension in the changes ahead, not run away from them, as that is where the magic happens.



LUCA GALLARELLI

**Brian Mtongana**, Executive Creative Director, Woolworths South Africa presented on the Woolworths “Difference” brand philosophy, unpacking his take on what makes a brand valuable and a premium brand, using examples from the Woolworths brand to illustrate each point:

**D – Distinction.** Brand distinction is what sets a brand apart, its unique identity that makes it memorable for consumers, and a clear brand identity in the market. This includes brand identity (visual elements), brand positioning, unique value proposition, brand storytelling, innovation, consistency, target audience, customer experience, and data.

**I – Innovation.** How you innovate your products, including the production cycle. It is important to innovate consistently to stand out.

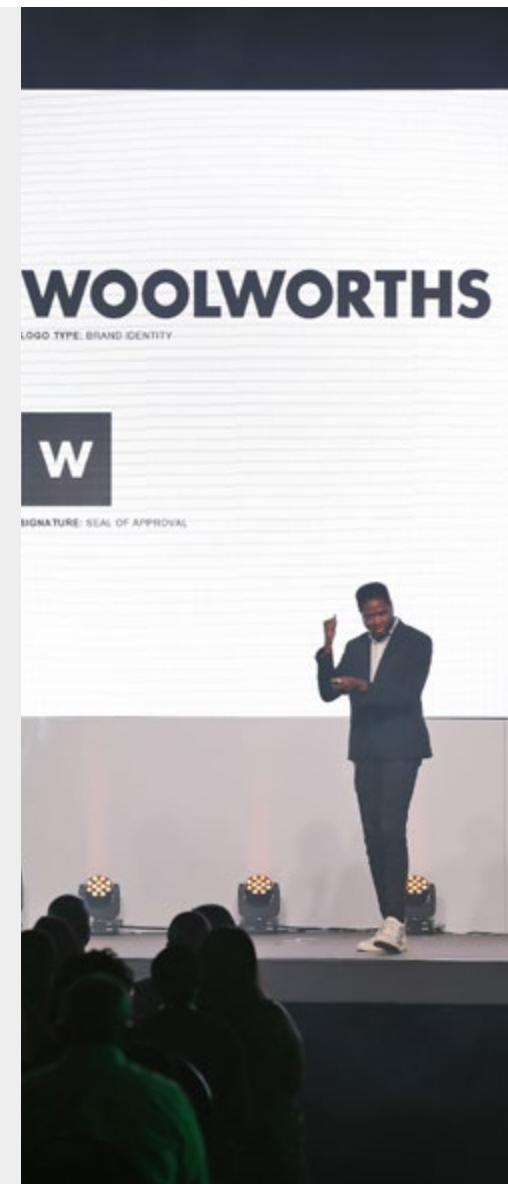
**F – Fresh Consistency.** Consistency ensures your brand is easily recognisable across all touchpoints, but it is not enough, the fresh consistency speaks to the flexibility and innovation that keeps your brand alive and first to market with innovation.

**F – First to Market.** Do things no other brand has done, do them well and be first. Mtongana cited the retailer’s cold chain process, and the Sell By dates on packaging that Woolworths was the first to introduce in the retail space in South Africa, as examples of actions that have contributed to the brand positioning.





- E – Exceptional Quality.** Be known for your quality products, including supply chain sourcing and raw ingredients. Stand for something, be it fresh, local suppliers or healthy ingredients, the purpose of the brand must be supported through the process of delivering the brand offering.
- R – Responsible.** Doing good is good business. Be a responsible brand and make decisions that are good for your customer and the community, even if they impact profits. For example, when Woolworths removed sugary treats from point-of-sale aisles, reducing the temptation of ‘pester power’, it lost money, but continued the practice as they believe it to be the right thing to do.
- E – Employees.** Employees can be a differentiator in the market. Mtongana described their food technologists and helpful floor staff, down to their trolleys which are well-maintained, speaking to quality brand experience, “which is why you steal them to shop in other retailers... They are the Rolls Royce of supermarket trolleys!”.
- N – Nimble.** Brands need to be able to respond immediately when the opportunity presents, but with grace. You can be a premium brand, but you can also have fun.
- C – Customer Experience.** Customer experience must be superb – from inside stores, to how the brand interacts in the marketplace with consumers, to how you show up on social media.
- E – Engaged.** Find a way to talk directly with your customers across various touchpoints and categories.



Opening speaker Pearl Thusi suggested brands maintain truthful personalities. As an entrepreneur and celebrity influencer, she held a mirror up close to her personal brand, stating, “I’m here to discuss real life.” When admitting she felt “unworthy” addressing this audience, her lesson was to take brand imperfections and criticism and use it to weave your authentic truth, including the landmarks along the way.

Thusi’s comments set the stage for a panel discussion on why brands are worried about their reputation. When trust is low in Government institutions, the expectation is for business to take the lead, being truthful about their corporate intentions. “The future of reputation is an organisation that actually stands for something,” said **Dustin Chick**, Managing Director, Razor PR, who led the discussion on brand reputation with **Arun Sudhaman**, CEO and Editor-in-Chief, PRovoke Media; and **Shayoni Lynn**, CEO and Founder of Lynn.





Chick emphasised that reputation was the domain of everyone, not just corporate communications. Reputation management is changing and influencing how brands show up in the world. Sudhaman added that reputation risk was accelerating due to the volatility in the world. Corporations are also being held to much higher standards and are expected to have an opinion on current events. But they then run the risk of “virtue signalling or greenwashing” if they don’t read the room correctly.

“The rise of ESG regulations, in particular, means there are real world consequences and penalties for brands and companies that make commitments and don’t follow through in terms of actions and actual impact. Employees now have an expectation that their companies and CEOs will stand for something and take action on the issues of the day,” Sudhaman explained.

As brand guardians, however, companies also need to fear the rise of intentional brand disruption through disinformation, to protect their organisation’s reputation. Lynn discussed how the disinformation actors understand very well how human behaviour works, and the fact that communities are being radicalised and polarised by being served content intended to manipulate and cause harm, was not just a political issue, but also a brand issue. “We need to be more proactive to protect our audiences, to protect our organisations. It is not just a political issue. It is an issue for every one of us. It will affect your brand. Not if, but when. We all need to wake up to this huge threat.”



Standing for nothing is interpreted in a different way these days, it doesn't mean neutrality, and it says a lot to stakeholders, consumers, investors, and internally, to employees. Saying nothing carries as much risk as saying something. As humans we trust people who follow through on their promises. Behaviour is the only real measure of reputation. Unfortunately, many companies talk a great game, but don't follow through." Chick encouraged brands to engage in hard conversations. "Our behaviour is our truth. There is a massive expectation gap and a hesitancy gap." His three takeaways for brands to be intentional about reputation, were:

1. The time to stand up is now.
2. Reputation is B2Everyone.
3. Behaviour is truth.

## AUTHORS' INSIGHT

Maintaining strong brand reputation goes further than brand identity or authentic brand values. It means that brands must also be clear about where they stand in society on issues that matter to their consumers; as well as understanding and defending themselves against intentional brand disruption or misinformation.

*"Authentic storytelling builds trust and appeals to consumers' emotions. There is value in empathising with clients."*

**KHENSANI NOBANDA**  
Group Executive: Marketing & Corporate Affairs, Nedbank



**KHENSANI NOBANDA**

### HEART – Being Human is a Gift.

Getting to the personal heart of the matter was **Roanna Williams**, Chairperson of the Creative Circle. Her presentation, entitled, 'Can Creativity Change the World?' was about the origins of the teddy bear, as she believes the best stories and ideas come from the heart. Taking the delegates back to 1902, when the then US President Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt, released a bear brought for him to shoot on a hunt. This story caught the attention of press and public and a sweet shop owner created a fluffy toy, called a Teddy Bear. Marketers seized on this opportunity and over the decades, the teddy bear was firmly established as a cultural icon with long term, meaningful impact.



ROANNA WILLIAMS

“Creativity that can change the world springs from genuine moments of humanity because it has the power to change hearts for generations. So, hell yes, creativity can change the world because it has the power to change how people feel. I ask you to put your heart in the middle of life, let it get in the way, because it might lead to a creative idea that can change the world for good.”

**Anganathi Beyile**, shared similar sentiments as he told us about his personal journey, and presentation on, ‘Purpose up close. Is yours proper or pandering?’. Beyile delivered his piece and enhanced what Nedbank’s Ciko Thomas called marketers to do, keep culture close. He bridged the gap between marketers and consumers that can be taken for granted. He reminded us, as Avatar’s **Mzama Xala** showed, that there really are interesting things happening on the ground. Thankfully, the young are vocal, the young are driven and courageous enough to hold us to account as “...our messages unify us or divide us”.

Beyile’s discussion and audit of brand behaviour encouraged companies to recognise the role that they have in this world. He highlighted the risks that come with purpose pandering, and he shared how people of his generation “have high expectations of what they believe and value”. He advised delegates to consider how, “we as marketers have the power to form, mould and change people’s perceptions on a variety of different things and we should not take that power for granted”.



**ANGANATHI BEYILE**

AUTHORS' INSIGHT

Beyile referred to historic South African moments, such as when Francois Pienaar handed the Rugby World Cup trophy to Nelson Mandela in 1995, to support the key fact that he asked marketers to remember: the call for brands to build communities through moments that unite us. The delivery of this speech by a young man, delivered to a crowd of experts, is progress that inspires the heart.

Emotions are a crucial part of marketing communications and marketers need to remain cognisant of how brands make consumers feel through their messages. Understanding the heart of a consumer and connecting with them through this understanding can have a lasting effect and brand connection. Emotional connections should be considered through the stages of the customer and user experience.

*"Connection matters: 86% of award-winning global Effie Awards best of the best cases exhibit empathy. It's not about you. It's about connecting with your audience, and it matters a lot."*

**ALLISON KNAPP WOMACK**  
Chief Operating Officer, Effie Worldwide



**ALLISON KNAPP WOMACK**

## CONCLUDE

Speakers talked to marketers of their value, worth and role that they have toward their brands, companies, colleagues, customers and communities. Marketers were reminded about why we do what we do and that we are who we are for a purpose beyond, but in no way against, the money we make. How our “Africanness” that enriches the truth of the brands we build from the heart, is not to be forgotten, but can be a bedrock of magnificent marketing.

Through the analysis of the hemispheres of the brain to beats of the heart, the depth of the impact which marketers have, moves in the messages which we share, and we are reminded that this is not the first time we have worked with something new, and we should be encouraged to explore AI. We must recognise the fast pace of change that AI is facilitating, marketers will need to enhance efforts to keep to the pace of these changes as online communities we once knew are evolving and some are at risk of disappearing; our brands remain vulnerable to the world around them it and we must safeguard them and strengthen their core identity. In the end it is all about our indomitable, innovative, creative, problem-solving African spirit, which puts the needs of the collective, our communities, above the needs of the individual, and it is this spirit of Ubuntu that we need to export to the rest of the world. **Marketing. UpClose&Personal.**



# Thank You

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