

Newsmaker: Qondisa Ngwenya, Wunderman Thompson's Prism Sport + Entertainment MD

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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In August, Wunderman Thompson launched a new offering in South Africa, marking the expansion of London-based Prism Sport + Entertainment into the South African market.



Wunderman Thompson launches Prism Sport + Entertainment in South Africa

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Qondisa Ngwenya is leading the unit as managing director. He's a sponsorship veteran, with 25 years of sponsorship and broadcasting experience gained from managing large sponsorships, major events execution, content development and aggregation, rights negotiation and sales across Sub-Saharan Africa.



Congrats on your role! How do you feel about it?

Thank you so much. It's great to be joining Wunderman Thompson which is on an upward growth trajectory with grand ambitions. So, I am very excited. It's an excellent opportunity to build a sponsorship division backed by a solid international footprint.

I look forward to bringing in what I have learnt over the years into a new and bigger environment. Our world changed dramatically in a matter of six months, and new behaviours are emerging, many of which will remain post the Covid pandemic. We need to be smarter, bolder and quicker in delivering sponsorship marketing solutions that merge the digital and material world.

How and when did this come about or take effect?

Wunderman Thompson leadership reached out to me by asking if I would be keen to retire from farming and come back to

the industry – not that one can ever retire from farming! But, he had a compelling idea of setting up Prism as a sponsorship division of Wunderman Thompson South Africa. Post the 2010 FIFA World Cup years, I felt that sponsorship needed to be more integrated with other brand and business communication channels as there was greater convergence happening. This was a great opportunity to realise this, and after conversations with the global CEO of Prism, Jamie Copas, I was convinced to take up the challenge.

▣ ***What does the role entail?***

My remit is to establish Prism as the sponsorship division of Wunderman Thompson South Africa, and grow our brand presence in the market. Accordingly, it involves a lot of brand business development in the initial period especially.

▣ ***What excites you most about the agency and your role in particular?***

The positioning of Wunderman Thompson as a part-creative, part-technology and part-consultancy, resonates as a great establishment point to our approach to sponsorship. I'm excited at the opportunity of working in a broader creative and technology environment with a global footprint and using the plentiful skill sets in the overall business to deliver top-shelf sponsorship solutions that not only create connections for brands with the "communities" they serve but drive business too. The skill set combination we have in the broader Wunderman Thompson business, together with my sport and entertainment sponsorship experience provides a unique blend that is non-existent in the market right now. I have already seen how compelling that is, from the business development work we have done so far.

▣ ***Comment on the current state of the industry.***

Never before has the industry been turned on its head as it has been by the Covid-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, this became a reality within four months of me starting this position. I've looked at it as an opportunity to a major step-change and pivot from sponsorship being the tool to 'shake the hands of the fans,' to the tool that allows us to converse with fans in the space of their choosing at any given time. We can work with a higher degree of frequency, and in a more tailored way, demonstrate that we care about the things that matter to them. Also, we can express that as a brand, we want to grow together with them.

Sponsorship is less about brands changing the colour of the event, and more about how can you make this experience richer and deeper for the fans. It's less about disruption and more about building shared value.

Sponsorship needs to pivot away from "badging-led activations" towards technology-led creative solutions. Such solutions must be driven by putting the customer journey front and centre of what we do, i.e. how can we not only make the journey to a seat in a stadium frictionless but free up the creative class (the Gen Zs) to participate in the "design" of the solutions that drive the consumption of their passion. Only those sponsorship properties that fit in the brand's eco-system offer real value for brands.

▣ ***What do you love most about your career?***

I have had the opportunity to work in the most diverse of communities in terms of culture and class and have learnt a lot from it. I have worked with ordinary civilians, captains of industry and leaders of the state. All of it has taught me a lot of humility, to listen and observe with purpose, and always design relevant engagement solutions. I have had experiences that no picture can capture but are ingrained in my memory and have shaped the lens with which I view brand communications.

■ ***Tell us a bit about your experience and how this has equipped you for your new position.***

Having worked in an agency that was part of a global network has proved most valuable. That, together with my previous and current sports involvement, has allowed me to work with some of the biggest brands globally, as well as with some of the biggest rights owners and broadcasters around the world, including Fifa and the IOC. Locally and across the African continent, I have overseen the launch and event managed some of the biggest sport and entertainment events under very trying conditions. All of this allowed me to learn from some of the best-in-class events and equally showcase what South Africans are capable of.

I am, therefore, no stranger to starting things from scratch and scaling up quickly. It's been like that since my first national job when I was appointed the national development manager at the tender age of 24 at the National Sports Council. On my first day there, I had to load a truck to go and set up our office with a division of a total of one to eight people when I left.

■ ***What are you most looking forward to (at Wunderman Thompson/in your new role)?***

We have a great leadership team. I'm enjoying the challenge of being part of a driven and conscientious group. I want to grow this business and make an indelible mark in transforming the industry in outlook and use our diversity as a source of inspiration for what we do. I also want to create very South African award-winning campaigns.

■ ***What's at the top of your to-do list?***

To build Prism to be the creatively, technology, strategy and insights-led agency of record in South Africa. To do that we need to win business and put a few quick runs on the board, so-to-speak.

■ ***What are you currently reading/watching/listening to?***

Well, I am always reading two to three books at any given time. Currently, I am reading *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty (this might take a while); *The Body: A Guide for Occupants* (fascinating science for someone who sometimes drives their body to complete exhaustion) and lastly, *Cricket and Conquest: The History of South African Cricket Retold* by Andre Odendaal, Krish Reddy, Christopher Merret and Jonty Winch (which is very interesting given the current state of cricket in our country; this is a must-read for those wishing to effect changes in the sport).

■ ***Tell us something about yourself not generally known?***

I have completed ten Comrades Marathons, and in so doing, joined the green number club. It was a ten-year project naturally, and that demanded consistency and tenacity. It has opened up other avenues for me to transition into ultra-trail running and cycling, and now I get to see some of the most beautiful places in our country.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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