

Catching up with Marketing Leadership and Innovation Award recipient Khensani Nobanda

By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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This year's Loeries Marketing Leadership and Innovation Award winner, Khensani Nobanda, Nedbank group executive: Group Marketing and Corporate Affairs, tells us that it comes down to driving real business growth and using creativity to achieve this.



Khensani Nobanda



Khensani Nobanda, 2021 Loeries Marketing Leadership and Innovation Award winner

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📌 ***Congratulations, Khensani! How do you feel about the win and what does this award mean to you?***

Thank you! I feel incredibly proud because it is a testament to the decision that we made as a bank that we will use creativity to drive the growth of our brand and business. So, it's gratifying to see the results of the work done by my marketing team and the agencies we work with acknowledged externally.

📌 ***Why do you believe you were chosen?***

I think because in a world where in many businesses marketing has been viewed simply as a brand building exercise, I have built a career that says, yes, it's for that, but it also delivers real business growth. And that has always been what I've tried to drive with the marketing teams and agencies that I've worked with.

📌 ***You've been with Nedbank since 2017 and have worked for some of South Africa's most successful companies.***

Comment on your career path to this momentous point?

I've been incredibly lucky to have worked on some of the strongest brands globally and on the continent. Starting at Unilever gave me an unparalleled foundation in marketing. Working on many different categories, such as alcohol, skin care, telecoms, means this foundation has been built and tested in various categories.

I do think being at Nedbank feels like it was meant to be. Seems corny, but I say that because it feels like the brand, the organisation and my energy have come together at exactly the right time.

▣ *What work are you most proud of and what are you working on at the moment that you're particularly excited about?*

Definitely the Secrets campaign at Nedbank. That particular campaign was a clear signal that as a brand, we take our purpose of helping people manage their money better seriously, and that we're brave enough to land this messaging in a way you wouldn't expect a bank to.

Over the last few years, Nedbank has transformed itself in many ways, but especially in how digitised the bank is. For example, our app is the best rated app on both iOS and Android, but, frustratingly, the consumer perception on how digital we are has changed very slowly.

I'm excited about the campaign that we're working on to directly address this. With our lead agency Joe Public, we have a vision that says we will create work where people will ask "Did a Bank Do That?" – and definitely, our new work will get people asking that question.

❑ ***You had dreamt of winning this award since 2007. What do you think motivated you to believe that you could win it and to actually do what it took to stand a chance?***

I love winning – ha ha ha! Seriously, I've always wanted to be an impactful marketer – and for me winning this award means that, in many ways, I have achieved that.

“ *I'm certainly not a marketer who is happy to go quietly into retirement.* ”

❑ ***You grew up in Swaziland, Mozambique, Zambia and Ghana. What about your childhood or upbringing do you believe has shaped you and your success today?***

Absolutely! Growing up in so many countries meant my change resilience muscle is strong and I can adapt to any environment. It means I'm curious as well – I read voraciously and that helps me grow daily. And finally, it also means I don't allow the country that I live in to constrain my thinking because from a young age, I knew that the world is more than where I live, and there's so much to see, experience and learn globally.

❑ ***What else do you attribute your success to?***

I grew up in a family where my dad told me that no one can ever tell you what you can or cannot do. So that mindset has always carried me. My parents have always been supportive of me. Real confidence builders.

❑ ***What caused you to get into brand communication, some 20 years ago?***

As a kid I thought marketing was just advertising and didn't think that I was creative enough for it.

❑ ***What have you become most passionate about in the marketing space over the years?***

It may sound like a cliché, but I have loved how brands have chosen to have a voice in the world on real societal issues. I am passionate about continuing to position Nedbank in this way.

I am also passionate about growing more diverse talent in the industry, so in the last few years I have become more focused on mentorship.

And finally, I am also passionate about continuing to grow our marketing discipline as a clear business growth driver.

“ *We're not just pretty pictures people – although we love them.* ”

❑ ***Preetesh refers to you as a “brave marketer”. Why do you think bravery or taking risks is so important in this space and what advice would you give to the next generation of brave marketers, so to speak, with regard to this?***

Bravery will allow us as marketers not just to do great work creatively, but will seek innovative solutions to solve real consumer needs, in order for our organisations to grow.

The best advice I can give is if the work that you are doing is rooted in a real consumer insight and is a clear demonstration of the brand – then go for it. Garner support for it across the organisation. What's the worst that can happen? They say no? Then you learn from the no's, go back to the drawing board and come back. At some stage there will be a yes, and that yes will create work that will become a virtuous cycle.

❑ ***In the release you said that you believe marketers have the ability to understand consumer behaviours. “We know how to influence those behaviours. Accountants can tell you the numbers, but ultimately a large part of the growth of the bank is down to how the marketing team tells the story of our brand and its offerings and how this impacts consumers choices.” To elaborate on this, do you believe marketing or, more broadly, creativity is valued as it should be?***

We've seen many studies clearly showing that creativity grows brands. Brands like Burger King and Nike are testament to that. So, my challenge to marketers is if we know this, why would we produce vanilla work? I don't advocate creativity for creativity's sake, but really using creativity to grow our brands and businesses.

■ ***And lastly, comment on the state of the industry and the impact you hope to see in the industry over the next few years.***

I had a conversation with our CE Mike Brown at the Nedbank IMC Conference around does he view marketing as an indecent proposal? And his answer was absolutely not. We need to move the marketing conversation from a cost centre that is the first to be cut when there is a decline in financial performance, but rather to a clear growth and value driver.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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