

Sarah-Jane Harling joins BBC Worldwide to grow its advertising business across Africa

 By Jessica Tennant

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BBC Worldwide recently appointed Sarah-Jane Harling in the newly created role of advertising account director for its Africa division, based at BBC's Melrose Arch office.



Sarah-Jane Harling, account director: advertising at BBC Worldwide Africa.

“Having worked alongside the BBC Worldwide Africa team over the years,” says Harling, “it is great to be able to help further promote our portfolio of channels to advertising partners across the continent. I’m really looking forward to working with everyone to ensure our advertising offering goes from strength to strength.”

The new role will see Harling responsible for all advertising matters for the region across BBC Brit, BBC Lifestyle, BBC First and BBC Earth, and promoting these channel offerings to advertising partners in South Africa in partnership with DStv Media Sales, where she was previously manager of the international channels.

This comes at a time when the corporation is looking to grow its advertising business and implement some exciting changes. Joel Churcher, GM and vice president for BBC Worldwide, Africa, who Harling now reports to, says, “As our branded services rely more and more on advertising revenue to deliver profit and fund local productions, our ad sales expertise needs to grow.”

Hence the need for a local voice on the ad sales team, adds Harling. “Having worked closely with the BBC Worldwide team and their five channels previously, I’m familiar with the brand and understand the business. Part of the BBC Worldwide strategy is also to establish an effective local team to ensure we reflect and embrace our African audiences.”

Here, Harling goes into more detail about the new role and how she plans to grow the corporation’s advertising business and footprint into Africa through establishing partnerships with advertisers.

■ What are some of the opportunities and challenges currently facing the corporation?

As a business operating in South Africa, challenges mirror the country’s economic situation. Consumer spending and advertising confidence is important for our business. We see more advertisers wanting brand integration and we will see the return of the hit local production, *The Great South African Bake Off* for a third series, which is very exciting... We also know how popular British programmes are across Africa, so that’s a definite area of focus.

■ How do you plan to grow the corporation’s advertising business?

Working in conjunction with DStv Media Sales, we need to continue conversations with our advertisers and my core focus will be on driving branded partnerships around local productions and channel content.

■ What are some of the ‘exciting changes’ you’ll be implementing?

We’ve seen changes in advertising expectations on branded services and brand integration in TV advertising and sponsorship as a whole. As with many other channels, buying content in a ready-to-broadcast format from studios and simply broadcasting this into South Africa, there are limitations. I’m hoping to make a difference through local production

and branded content creation by increasing the number of brand partnerships on our channels and taking on-air into off-air, offering advertisers more than just TV ratings.

■ Comment on your previous experience and how it has led you to your new position.

I joined the BBC Worldwide Africa team from DSTV Media Sales, where I was manager of the commercial international channels. I was with them for almost 20 years where I had the opportunity to grow my expertise in the various areas within the business and moved in rank, before moving across to BBC Worldwide. With extensive experience in research, pricing, planning, business analysis, strategy, content management and sales, I wanted to focus my skills and attention, and develop myself on a more specialised level, specifically across the BBC channels. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

■ What do you love most about your career in advertising?

There are so many facets to advertising and working with channel content that I enjoy. I think, recognising how brands can connect and partner with content, to the point of seeing the creative execution on air, there are moments of excitement, being able to stand back and smile and see the final result, and of course, happy advertisers.

■ What industry trends do you predict for the next year?

Like any business operating in our economic climate, we are prey to advertising budget trends, and more recently in our economy, marketing budgets are not seeing massive growth. When times are tough we see advertisers looking for much more ROI. I don't anticipate any radical changes in the coming months. We'll need to keep an eye on digital activities as the growth in access to digital platforms continues with broadband and will need to combine this as complimentary to our channel offering. Brands want to compete in a global environment and technology brings us so much closer to what global counterparts are doing. Being part of a Pay TV offering that has subscribers choosing how they watch content, we see advertisers wanting to get more involved and leverage off all these platforms.

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

Following on from our Winter Upfront event on Tuesday, 23 May, which will showcase our lineup of world-class programmes to our advertising clients based here in South Africa, I am also working on opportunities surrounding our latest local production; the third series of *The Great South African Bake Off*. As the second series successfully attracted over two-million viewers on BBC Lifestyle, I'm confident we will be able to entice some fantastic brands to partner with us.

■ What inspires you?

I have a creative mind and active imagination. I did art all through school and still have a passion for it and I guess this is where my excitement comes from, matching brands to content without having to create the actual advert. I love hearing people's stories, listening to their insights and experiences on a personal level. I find inspiration on a deeper level, the nuances from the unspoken.

■ What are you currently reading/listening to for work?

I love reading, but I do it more for downtime, escapism. I pick up a book every now and then for work purposes and generally by recommendation, titles like *The Mind of a Fox*, by Chantell Ilbury and more recently, *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell. The internet provides a wealth of short-form articles too. I enjoy working to the sounds of Kirk Whalum, my favourite jazz saxophonist. I like to listen to Ted Talks; Sid Sinek seems to be the trending favourite so I like to dip in to see what he's all about.

■ Tell us something about yourself not generally known.

Suits and boots are my style in the office and you will mostly see me power dressing. Behind all of that I'm an avid camper and have a keen interest in birdlife, more specifically owls. Quite the juxtaposition.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

Jess is Senior Editor: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com. She is also a contributing writer. marketingnews@bizcommunity.com

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