

Natalie Celani, marketing & innovation director at Diageo celebrates 20 years in alcohol industry

 By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

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Natalie Celani celebrates 20-years of success as a marketer in the alcohol industry. In her current role as marketing and innovation director at Diageo she says she is passionate about learning about new cultures, a crucial tool that bolsters her marketing strategies.



Natalie Celani is the marketing and innovation director at Diageo. Source: Supplied.

■ ***Take us through the evolution of your career.***

The early years of my career saw me moving to London and working as a global brand manager for Peroni. In 2010 I moved to Tanzania as a marketing manager, and this is where my love for the continent of Africa was ignited and I haven't left the continent since.

Following my stint in Tanzania I moved to beautiful South Africa where I had a regional role with SABMiller which allowed me to work across different countries and brands. This was an incredible experience for me because being a marketer having an understanding and an appreciation for people and culture goes hand in hand.

In 2018 I joined Diageo in Ethiopia as a marketing director. Joining the Diageo family was a no brainer for me – working on brand such Johnnie Walker, Smirnoff, Tanqueray, Guinness, Captain Morgan and many more is any marketer's dream particularly those in the alcohol industry.

■ ***What does your role entail?***

As marketing and innovation director at Diageo South Africa , there are three main aspects to my role that see me operating from a strategic perspective with leadership requirements to shaping the culture of the organisation and the brands that we work on.

1. I am responsible for brand portfolio strategies anchored by consumer insights and trends that have the power to drive sustainable and profitable growth for the business.
2. I am also a leader, a role I take very seriously as allows me to role model, inspire and grow the future leaders of the company.

3. Lastly, I am also responsible for brand advocacy – as you can imagine we work on brands that enjoy a tremendous amount of media and consumer attention. It is important to utilise the opportunities and responsibility that our iconic brands have to shape culture and drive some important topics, such as responsible drinking and progressive portrayal through our communication strategies.

▀ **What interested you in the alcohol industry?**

The alcohol industry can be a lot of fun. We are a part of people's celebrations and connections. Our industry also gives us an opportunity to utilise our brands to enhance and shape the future of celebrations, through great experiences, iconic brands and phenomenal products.



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In addition to that, because of the nature of the business and what we do, when you work in the alcohol industry you create some strong bonds with your colleagues and I have to say that I have made some amazing friends at work throughout my career across the various markets I have worked in.

▀ **What are the biggest challenges in your role?**

I work in a very competitive environment with tremendous pressure to deliver at all times and stay ahead of the competition. Not only do I have to ensure that I stay at the top of my game when the pressure is on, but I am also responsible for keeping the team motivated and engaged – which can be challenging at times.

▀ **What have been the highlights of your career?**

My experiences in my career have really made me a very strong person. I have had the amazing opportunity of working in different markets with different people which has taught me to adapt, deliver and grow as I moved across different markets and cultures.

When I look back at my career, whether I was front and centre for an exciting and game-changing campaign that delivered on business objectives or experimented with campaigns that didn't work as well but allowed me to learn from failures and setbacks.

I am extremely proud of the fact that I always moved forward, met and learned from amazing people along the way, and most importantly that I had the opportunity to motivate and inspire others to believe in themselves and become great leaders.

▣ **What impact do you want to have on your industry?**

I believe that it is important that we deliver opportunities for consumers to enjoy more cheers but do so within moderation – which is something that our *Captain Morgan Enjoy Slow* campaign aimed to achieve – and inspire consumers to enjoy our brands responsibly. We should also utilise our brands to drive much needed conversations on inclusion, diversity and sustainability. We are on a journey and everyone in the industry is fortunately realising the importance of these topics, so the more we can all work towards the same agenda, the greater impact our industry can have on society.

▣ **Any advice for young marketers who want to end up in a niche field?**

Marketing really gives you endless opportunities regardless of which industry you are in. It is really exciting as it places consumers at the centre of everything we do. For you to really succeed and truly make an impact it is important that you develop and maintain a culture of curiosity, the will to continuously learn, to trust the process and in the words of one of our iconic brand, Keep Walking!

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

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