

Generic business lessons for the 21st Century from healthcare advertising

By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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Mandi Fine is CEO of F/NE Group Global, a strategic consultancy that works with some of the world's top brands and corporations and turns 20 years old this August. Here, Fine explains how specific data science and storytelling skills are transforming marketing and communications, as well as future trends to embrace in any industry.

Fine says focusing on being female and what that means has never been a part of her consciousness as she finds herself in boardrooms full of men all the time, and has always focused on doing what's right for their brands and bringing the "finest" solution to the table, gender aside.

As an entrepreneur, she hasn't had to fight the gender gap in corporate environments and was blessed to be able to manage her time as a mother and a business owner, so that juggle was always in her own hands.

She holds both a degree in Drama and an MSc in neuroscience. Explaining what that brings to her business, she says:



Mandi Fine, CEO of F/NE Group Global.

“ The skill of being able to analyse content with a scientific ‘hat’ on, with an analytical view, is critical to our business. The technical nature of our clients’ businesses means we have to be able to digest and interrogate technical and scientific content. Given artificial intelligence (AI) and the digital nature of the world, we have more and more information at our fingertips. The skill of a scientist, of discerning what information is important and how to use it, is a fundamental ability that marketing and communications consultants should ideally have. Drama, on the other hand, gives one the confidence to stand up and present in front of people, but it is also a robust communication base. At F/NE, we believe that the future of strategic marketing is in the convergence of science and art, and I am very fortunate to have studied both. ”

Here, Fine explains how SA's health communications differ from the rest of Africa and indeed the rest of the world, with insights into what the future holds based on current trends in healthcare advertising...

■ **Let's start at the very beginning – share the context of how and why you started the business, initially as Fine Healthcare and significant changes to operations since then.**

While living in New York in 1999 I worked in healthcare marketing and communication, and very quickly realised its importance and how it was such a specialised, underserved area of marketing in South Africa at that time. So, I came home to start Fine Healthcare, with the vision of empowering South Africans, healthcare workers and doctors with health information and education.

“ Things were ‘f/ne’ in [#Dubai](#) as [@MandiFine](#) from our South Africa partner was a judge at this year's Dubai Lynx Healthcare Awards! [#dubailynx](#) [#dubailynx2019](#) [#creativeawards](#) [@FHC_ZA](#) <https://t.co/6CDsZEVkaT> <pic.twitter.com/UZLLnXsu3Q>— GLOBALHealthPR (@GLOBALHealthPR) [March 14, 2019](#) ”

We have been working with multinational and local clients for 20 years and have helped build clients' brands from across the healthcare value chain, from pharmaceutical companies to hospital groups, funders and NGOs alike.

About 15 years into our journey, we realised that the skill of understanding complex information in regulated industries, simplifying that information and turning it into engaging communication, was a skillset that was sought after in other complex and regulated industries.

So, we rebranded and restructured into F/NE Group Global, a strategic communications consultancy that now serves global and local brands across multiple industries.



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We love working with complex, matrixed organisations with complicated content, lots of data and analytics – that's our happy space. We now serve clients spanning IT, legal, insurance, banking and healthcare.

■ **Excellent growth! Placing the spotlight on you specifically, what did you want to be when you grew up, and what do you still plan to accomplish?**

When I was a little girl I wanted to be on the stage, hence the Drama degree.

“ While I may not be on the literal stage, I think that the digital platforms we have at our disposal as marketers give us the biggest stage in the world. ”

So, I am very grateful to be living my childhood dream. Despite being 20 years in, I feel that I am just beginning to have the kind of global impact I've always dreamt of. There's still so much work to be done in uplifting, upskilling and empowering the developing world with education and information.

“ The phone rings...who could it be? Hear how [@MandiFine](#) from South Africa partner [@FHC_ZA](#) reacted when she received the call of a lifetime! [#GHPRPassport](#) [#SouthAfrica](#) [#Communications](#) [#Cannes](#) <https://t.co/XxkrQLaJ65>— GLOBALHealthPR (@GLOBALHealthPR) [February 11, 2019](#) ”

I believe that in the next 20 years, the impact of the skills we have learnt in the corporate sector will be put to good use in closing societal gaps like healthcare information gaps, technology knowledge gaps and economic gaps.

■ **Excellent. How does SA's health communications differ from the rest of Africa and indeed the rest of the world, and why?**

In SA, we are in a fortunate position to have access to world-class technology and communication channels, yet we still have emerging populations that need education and information to improve their health and change behaviours.

“ South Africa has over 82M cell phones subscriptions - should mobile [#communications](#) be a part of your next campaign for [#patients](#) and [#HCPs](#) in this region? Learn more: [#SouthAfrica](#) [#mobilemarketing](#) [@FHC_ZA](#) pic.twitter.com/mN2ljeJt8C— GLOBALHealthPR (@GLOBALHealthPR) [July 3, 2019](#) ”

We therefore need to be the most creative healthcare marketers and innovators. We should be envisioning solutions that are unique because of the divided world we live in.

One of the challenges for SA's health communication is that often we are mandated to work within global brand parameters. We are limited by global brand alignment versus being able to think about what the right message and communication approach is for our specific market, as we have our own diverse, unique demographic profile.

■ **How exactly do you improve access to health information on the continent then? What are the challenges in doing so that you need to innovate around?**

We are seeing amazing solutions to accessing healthcare information and healthcare on the continent.

Drone technology to deliver medication; mobile solutions to educate and inform patients; virtual doctor consults to enhance access to primary care; and telemedicine, the reading of healthcare results remotely; will all play a part in improving provision of healthcare, health education and information dissemination.



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■ ***There's been a marked rise towards morality marketing, purpose marketing and brand humanity – crucial when it comes to making sure there's access to basic services, especially healthcare, but it's easy to overstep the mark into 'wokewashing'. Share a few tips for brands on how to do this the right way, and any examples they can learn from? Purpose-driven marketing is all about authenticity – not just making promises, but keeping promises. Healthcare brands are the ones that should be spearheading purpose driven advertising, as they have the opportunity to really make a difference in people's lives.***



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For many years F/NE has been working with healthcare brands like Dettol and Nurofen, which have built meaningful hand-washing campaigns in schools and mom and baby programmes in hospitals, into their marketing budgets and brand plans.

Pharmaceutical companies have been implementing disease awareness and education campaigns for decades, maybe to grow their brands, but also to help create a healthier world.

I believe that these are good examples of brands that have stuck to the core of what they do and have authentically expanded into the “purpose-driven” space.



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For example, if your product kills 99% of germs, then do good in the places where germs are found, i.e.: handwashing. However, if that same brand tries to align with societal causes that are ‘on trend’ but don’t relate to the core of what the brand stands for – that’s when consumers become sceptical very quickly.

■ ***Speaking of consumer scepticism, you've served on the jury for international advertising awards competition Dubai Lynx 2019 and we've interviewed you on judging for Cannes Lions Health back in 2017 – the first-ever SA juror to do so. Talk us through the state of healthcare advertising at the moment. What are the biggest trends as we head into 2020, to cut through the clutter and better communicate with consumers?***

Artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR) and **new technologies** are redefining healthcare and the practice of medicine and care. I was very honoured to be a judge at Cannes Lions in the pharmaceutical category in 2017, and again this year at [Dubai Lynx](#).

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It was inspiring to see how technologies are being used in amazing ways in healthcare communication. The use of VR and AI can take patients and doctors to places they have never been before. Imagine using VR to reduce the pain of highly invasive therapies like chemotherapy or diminish the pain of phantom limb syndrome.

While algorithms will revolutionise healthcare, technology cannot replace the **caring** part of healthcare. Nurses and care workers will still be as important as ever, even as machines become more important in doing the more predictable tasks.

We are going to see more companies differentiating on “**care**” and “**purpose-driven marketing**”. Healthcare brands, more specifically, have the advantage of being able to really change the world by saving and enhancing lives.

■ ***There’s no denying the marketing and communications industry itself has changed rapidly in that time, largely due to technological innovation changing the way we do business. Share a few current trends in the data analytics and marcomms space in particular that have had an impact on your way of work.***

Technology has changed so much in the marketing and communications space. The channels for delivering messages are largely digital, and that means we can reach so many more people with lightning speed.

“ Decode Africa’s key economies.

Download our latest Africa Report <https://t.co/zsqYklF1Tx> [pic.twitter.com/opqBo5oVpl](https://t.co/opqBo5oVpl)— FINE (@FHC_ZA) [February 11, 2019](#) ”

Technology has also changed the way we work internally at F/NE. We have always operated as a “strategic hub,” with creative and implementation partners based all over the world. Those working relationships are now seamless.

“ We have designers in Sydney, writers in Israel and clients all over the world. No matter the distance, technology has brought us closer together – we are even running intimate face-to-face focus groups with professionals like lawyers and doctors across the globe, using Zoom or Skype. ”

■ ***Looking at the broader business context then, with the ever-increasing shift towards freelancing and the gig economy, what does the next generation of business leaders need to keep in mind as they try to make their mark on the world?***

For F/NE, our “strategic hub” model conceptualised 20 years ago by one of our founders Alan Teeger, was the key to business agility.

- Being able to buy in ‘best of breed’ resources on a needs-only basis, has been a business principle that has allowed us to deliver the finest work and contain costs. Models like this that are virtual and flexible will be more and more important as the workforce seeks flexibility themselves.
- Having a differentiated product or playing in a niche market has also been a big part of our longevity.
- Culture trumps strategy every time. Organisations that focus on culture, leadership and employee development, where staff feel that they belong, will attract talent over other organisations.
- ‘Doing good’ as part of the core business offering and building that into the way you work, will also allow organisations to live and authentically communicate their purpose.

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- Shifting towards a virtual way of working will come with its challenges. Incorporate the efficiencies that come with a virtual model where appropriate, but never underestimate the impact of face-to-face connection time with your team and clients.
 - Listen to what your clients are really asking for instead of trying to sell them what you've sold before.
 - Be willing to expand your own definition of what you do, as there may be a greater opportunity waiting on the other side.

We clearly need to marry the art of storytelling with the science of data to carve out a fine business future. Follow [Fine herself](#) and [Fine Group Global](#) on Twitter for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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