

Nokwe Ndwandwe of Nissan South Africa

 By Imran Salie

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Nokwe Ndwandwe is a brand manager at Nissan South Africa with a product portfolio that encompasses LCV/SUV products and the Nissan Intelligent Choice used car brand. She has been in this position since 2017 with access to global resources and exposure to digital and precision marketing training for effective targeting and messaging. Her role is one that is cross-functional working with creative agency, media, PR, internal stakeholders and suppliers to execute marketing communication objectives.



Nokwe Ndwandwe

Here, Ndwandwe talks about her role, recent campaigns she has worked on, her career, and the activities she engages in outside of work.

📌 Can you share with our readers your recent brand campaigns and the rationales behind them?

I have worked on two recent campaigns, one being the relaunch of the Nissan Intelligent Choice Used Car Brand and the other being the locally produced new Nissan Navara that is set to launch in the first half of 2021.

The rationale behind introducing our used car brand and establishing it locally is to give consumers a sense of trust and comfort that they are buying a certified pre-owned vehicle through our Nissan dealerships. The used car market has also grown over the past few years and Nissan Intelligent Choice has to ensure that we provide the reassurance that the vehicles under this umbrella are inspected and have met certain criteria.

“ Building on our light commercial vehicle heritage, we are preparing to locally produce the new Nissan Navara. Here, we celebrate the men and women working hard to build the new bakkie with our customers in mind. Coming soon! Discover more: <https://t.co/Qsiobn1jwM> #NissanZA pic.twitter.com/UQCJ2fxR9b — Nissan South Africa (@nissanza) February 24, 2021 ”

Nissan South Africa has invested over R3bn into the Rosslyn Manufacturing plant to locally produce the new Nissan Navara. This project is the biggest the company has seen to date locally and has provided employment opportunities and

is contributing to economic growth and development. The biggest task we have on this project is awareness, ensuring that we use our resources accordingly to conquest and to reach the identified target audiences at the right place and at the right time and by serving them the right messages.

Precision marketing has been key in the conceptual phase of this campaign right through to planning and now production. Everything that we do on this campaign has the customer in mind and how to effectively reach them and speak to what is relevant to them and their needs. Nissan seeks to grow its market share in South Africa and to improve overall opinion as a brand.

■ ***Tell us more about your role and what it entails exactly***

As a brand manager, I like to refer to myself as “The Fixer” because there are so many moving parts to marketing and bringing campaigns to life that you have to constantly be on top of your game, have serious attention to detail, a creative eye, be adaptable and ready to step in to provide direction and solutions whatever the need may be.

My role starts from understanding the product, the local requirements and how it is aligned to our business and communication objectives. From there, we develop briefs for our media and creative agency – Nissan United which consists of TBWA and OMD - who then work on the strategic elements and the creative big idea to get us to a campaign that answers to the brand’s requirements.

My role is to act as the brand custodian at every step and to check ourselves and the agencies that we are delivering to Nissan’s Global brand standards and producing high-quality work that has the consumers in mind. Internally, a critical element is to work cross-functionally with various stakeholders to deliver the marketing communications elements of a launch and also ensure that we adhere to the process and approvals that maintain brand consistency.

■ ***Tell us about your career: what you studied and why, and how you ended up where you are today?***

I have a BCom: marketing management from the University of Pretoria. I started off my career in the events and entertainment scene while finishing off university and then worked on a social skills development project.

In 2013, I joined Nissan South Africa - my first corporate job as an events coordinator and marketing administrator. My role starting at Nissan was very exciting, my boss at the time was very fundamental in shaping who I am today because of her incredible work ethic and no-nonsense approach. She believed that we all have to deliver high-quality work and should never settle for mediocrity.

In 2016, I moved on from events and sponsorships into marketing communications as a brand coordinator. Having grasped the craft and understanding what is required to succeed in the role, I was promoted to brand manager and went back to school to pursue a post-graduate diploma in business administration at Gordon Institute of Business Science business school in 2018 to expand my knowledge base and offering as an individual.

Having enjoyed the studying experience and an increased level of productivity and positive work results, I then went back in 2020 to start my MBA journey. I have now completed Year 1 and have taken a formal break to allow myself to navigate through life, work and the pandemic in one piece with the intent to return to complete Year 2 in the next few months.

My journey has not been easy, teamwork is critical to success and a sense of belonging so you can deliver at your best. Working in automotive as a young Black female comes with its challenges, I have endured a lot which has shaped me into who I am today.

The mentorship, exposure working for an international company and support I have been offered by senior executives and my colleagues has really helped to accelerate my growth and get me to where I am today, working on the biggest launch for Nissan South Africa as a brand manager and a game-changer.

🔴 ***How has the pandemic and subsequent national lockdowns affected your work and the brands you oversee?***

The pandemic was tough in many aspects. For the brand, there were unfortunate financial implications for the organisation at first. We had to cut back on spend and halt our marketing plans which affected us negatively.

International skills were also in a deficit as many of our global employees located in South Africa had to travel back to their home countries so the company had to find ways to still be productive and deliver without these employees.

Toward the latter part of the year; the automotive industry and our brand started to see a slight recovery, although slow - there have been many challenges that came with the lockdown that is still being felt today whether it is due to stock availability, investment and spend.

🔴 ***Comment on the power of branded content as a form of advertising***

Branded content in an era of precision marketing is great, in our marketing strategies we make it a point to consider how to partner with brands that are the right fit and how we can leverage their platforms and audiences, this allows the brand to tailor and personalise communication for various target audiences and connect with what truly matters to them.

🔴 ***What professional development, musical, cultural, literary or leisure activities do you engage in?***

Professional development apart from my formal studies are precision marketing training through our Nissan United Global Academy and Digital courses – upskilling is a critical part of my role and is taken very seriously at Nissan, and reading a lot of books especially on self-improvement and on succeeding in life.

When I need an escape and to reset, I listen to House music, I meditate and also travel when my schedule allows. I am an explorer and adventurer at heart so trying new things, seeing the world and doing extreme adventures that are on my bucket list is what keeps me inspired to go out there, have fun and reward myself for all the hard work.

“ [#ObabesBesikhebe #ChampagneCampaign #BdayWeekend #BoatingInHarties #Glamfab pic.twitter.com/XQ5rJ3TaSj](https://pic.twitter.com/XQ5rJ3TaSj)— Nokwe Ndwandwe (@Noksy_N) April 8, 2017 ”

🔴 ***Consumers are increasingly favouring green and sustainable brands, do you have any plans or purpose to increase sustainability in the next 12 months?***

Globally, Nissan is an innovator in producing vehicles that favour the environment with our electric vehicle range and aim to produce fuel-efficient vehicles and further reduce vehicle CO2 emissions. Locally, we are aligned to the global direction with research underway to inform future strategies that look at furthering Nissan's commitment to electrification, reducing the carbon footprint and re-introducing electric vehicles back into the country.

🔴 ***What do you enjoy most about working in this space?***

Seeing projects and campaigns come to fruition after months and sometimes years of conceptualising to planning and execution. When a campaign goes live and we have used the data correctly, considered customer insights, getting positive reactions and meeting our objectives makes it all worth it. Another positive is the level of exposure working for an international company, the access to information and insights enables one to keep track of trends and what other markets are doing.

🔴 **What advice would you give to aspiring marketing and brand professionals?**

Marketing is exciting but do not be mistaken and think that it is easy. The fact that things are always changing and so rapidly means that you cannot and will not know it all, so continue to learn – academically and through your peers and colleagues. You have to try and be open to listening to others and respecting their opinions because that is where the importance of diversity comes into play and you start looking at things differently.

Utilise the resources that you have available, research is important, investigate what your competitors and aspirational brands in other industries are doing, analyse and understand the data and find ways with your teams to connect with and deliver what is right for your consumers and employees whilst building your brand.

ABOUT IMRAN SALIE

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