

Kate Owen, Uber SA marketing manager for Rides and Eats



By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Kate Owen is Uber SA marketing manager for Rides and Eats, based in Johannesburg. Having been at Uber for over four years, Kate has covered the marketing for Uber South Africa, the brand campaigns for Uber SSA and now research and strategy.

Prior to this, Owen gained through-the-line and digital marketing experience working for Ogilvy and Mather Johannesburg where she operated in a client service role working with international brands across the retail, FMCG and broadcast sectors.

Here, Owen unpacks Uber South Africa's brand marketing campaigns and strategies, amongst other things.

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

I studied Business Science Marketing at the University of Cape Town because I was fascinated by how brands/products/services communicated to their customers and what tactics one could use to differentiate in such a commoditised world.

I started my career at Ogilvy where I worked in client service in digital for three years and then realised how much I wanted to focus on just one brand to truly understand its business and marketing strategy and help drive considerable and measurable impact.

I heard about Uber via a friend and applied and successfully became the Johannesburg City Marketing Manager (at that stage most people thought Uber was an insurance company).

I have since been at Uber for six-and-a-half years (fun fact: currently the longest standing Uber employee (with Uber's Sub Saharan Africa communication manager, Samantha Fuller) and my roles have included city and country marketing for South Africa, brand and campaigns for SSA and research and strategy for SSA.



Kate Owen

■ ***What's the best part of your job?***

The people! I love working with every single person at Uber - whether in South Africa, in SSA, EMEA or globally. Everyone has the same passion for the company and drive to make it succeed which is so motivating!

The fast-paced and innovative environment means that the company changes every few months if not weeks, and is constantly adapting to what its customers need (drivers, riders, eaters, couriers, cities etc). Witnessing the technology developments and business strategy evolve first hand is inspiring! As an example, in 2020 when Covid-19 hit we immediately pivoted from being a mobility first company to focusing on delivery.

We accelerated our plans for essential items and convenience deliveries on Uber Eats and launched Uber Connect, a same day customer-to-customer delivery solution, which both have now become permanent options. We also temporarily

used our logistics platform to Move What Matters - which included free meals or rides to frontline workers, delivery of essential medicine to homebound patients and food parcels to those most vulnerable.

To ensure we adapt our technology to respond to the latest health and safety needs, we ensured all our safety features and policies were in line with the latest guidelines in each market.

For example, with the shortage of masks globally, we took the opportunity to showcase our commitment to our driver community by providing them with masks through a partnership with YES, a technology-based non-profit corporation (NPC) in South Africa. Globally we launched a mask verification feature to ensure all drivers and delivery people have masks before any trips take place.

Finally, the fact that everything I do has a greater purpose. My work in growing demand is helping to create economic opportunities for driver-partners and helping people get around their cities in a safe, affordable and convenient way.

■ **Can you share with our readers about Uber SA's recent brand campaigns and the rationales behind them?**

1. Mobility: Uber Go Campaign

- Objective: Create awareness of Uber Go - our best-priced mobility option for price-sensitive consumers which makes use of smaller, fuel-efficient hatchback vehicles - with the same quality and door-to-door safety experience, while highlighting the convenience in a way that authentically connects with South Africans



UberGo, a low-cost ride service, is now available in South Africa

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- Approach: Utilise geo-targeted media (as we decided to do a staggered launch in select suburbs new areas launching weekly) with simple, clear affordability messaging and photos of South African cities/suburbs
- Channels: Community radio, billboards and geo-targeted online media (YouTube, Twitter and Facebook)
- Results: Statistically significant uplifts on Ad Recall and Product Awareness on Brand Lift Studies

2. Delivery: Nobody Gets it Like We Do

- Objective: Get 18-45-year-olds who order takeaway via direct ordering or pick-up to switch to Uber Eats by showing them how it's an easier and more reliable way to get the restaurants they love
- Approach: Utilise a much-loved character Gogo and her family in food moments South Africans recognise while showcasing why Uber Eats is the most convenient brand in the country when it came to ordering food online
- Channels: TV and Digital (YouTube, Instagram and Facebook)
- Results: Our content scored a considerable lift on ad recall, message agreement and consideration

■ **Which consumer sector does brand Uber predominantly play in?**

Uber is a technology platform, and technology is at the heart of our approach. Uber brings an easy and affordable transport solution to people across the world, whereby riders can get a ride! We also help people order food and essentials quickly and affordably through the Uber Eats app, all at a touch of a button.

▣ ***What other sectors impact your industry?***

In addition to offering mobility and delivery, Uber has produced thousands of sustainable economic opportunities for drivers and delivery partners. We can also leverage our technology to offer additional solutions like Uber Connect, a customer-to-customer delivery solution, to surface earning opportunities when they are available.

▣ ***What do you think are the most successful channels for getting your brand message out there?***

We communicate to our users regarding our campaigns and reminding users of our features and products via our channels such as emails and in-app messages (pop-ups and in-app banners). To communicate to a wider audience we use digital and specifically Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Below are reasons why:

- We have significantly high awareness in South Africa. These channels are the best to help drive consideration and usage for the Uber brand which is our two main focus areas
- Our key audiences are also customers who use social media as their key media channels
- Additionally at Uber we focus on results-driven campaigns and these channels are fantastic at providing causal impact measurement on exposure and interaction through Google measurement tools like Brand Lift Study (BLS) and Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS)
- They also allow us to optimise content in real-time to ensure maximum performance

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

We do not have any specific campaigns in South Africa in the next 12 months, but I am quite proud of what we are looking to do globally. Uber is committing to becoming a fully electric, zero-emission platform by 2040, with 100% of rides taking place in zero-emission vehicles, on public transit, or with micro-mobility. It is our responsibility as the largest mobility platform in the world to more aggressively tackle the challenge of climate change.

With over 10 billion trips since we started in 2009, we've started reducing congestion and pollution in our cities by getting more people into fewer cars.

▣ ***If you were mentoring a future you, what career advice would you give to aspirant young marketing and branding professionals?***

Find a company whose product/service you truly believe in as you will deliver the best work when you are passionate about what you are talking about. Get truly passionate about research and insights as your customer is number one. And develop a work/life balance as this ensures you love your job more.

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

I have completed a Life Coach Course which has been instrumental in my career development at Uber, managing stress and working out how I want to manage my life versus work. I LOVE LOVE LOVE food and spend hours researching new restaurants to visit and experience with friends and family.

Running, yoga, pilates – all forms of exercise make me happy. I am aiming to do Africa X next year as a big goal! And of course family time. I have a 22-month-old boy and weekends are for quality time with him, my husband and our dog Rumpus.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

Editor at Bizcommunity.

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