

The tech world is a growing opportunity for women

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Michelle Wynne, head of marketing for sub-Saharan Africa at HMD Global, shares some insights into female adaptability and problem-solving as a female in the tech industry and what has helped her to grow in her career in this male-dominated sector.



Michelle Wynne, head of marketing sub-Saharan Africa at HMD Global

In South Africa, a [PWC report](#) estimates that women currently hold only 19% of tech-related jobs at the top 10 global tech companies versus their male counterparts. In leadership positions at these global tech giants, women make up 28%, with men representing 72%.

As a marketer and technology enthusiast, Wynne has had the pleasure of working in both FMCG and telco industries over the last 12 years to refine her competencies in brand and customer marketing, and people management across sub-Saharan Africa. She has an exceptional understanding of the African market, and played an instrumental role in Nokia's return to the local smartphone industry.

This [Women's Month](#), Wynne shares the lessons she feels has helped her garner success in this industry and tackles some of the challenges women may perceive as being barriers.

▣ **Could you describe a typical day in your job?**

I'm not sure a typical day exists in marketing. Any communications role is a dynamic function, that works across other functions in the organisation from both a local and global perspective.

On a day-to-day basis, I work with the teams to ensure that the right products are available at the right time in the right channels, and supporting them with a relevant campaign to convey benefits and delight consumers at the point of purchase. For this to happen, I have a number of working sessions, face-to-face meetings, or telecons with my teams and customers based in South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana.



Women don't need to 'grow a pair' to be successful

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▣ **What did you want to be when you grew up?**

Growing up, I always wanted to be a chef as I started cooking with my mom at seven years old. However, after job shadowing in a hotel kitchen, I felt my passion would be best served to friends and family only.

▣ **How did you get into the tech space?**

My career started in FMCG as a marketing graduate, fresh out of the University of Johannesburg.

“ *I had a driving desire to understand how things are made and why people buy them.* ”

It was whilst working on a well-known toothpaste and toothbrush brand that I was led to tech. In 2009, whilst doing research on toothbrush consumption in rural areas in Kenya, I was amazed that the number of cellphones in a household exceeded toothbrushes. It was at this point I became intrigued by the human connection to tech. When Nokia rang me in 2011, I jumped at the opportunity.



Nokia makes a comeback in South Africa with new phones

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▣ **What was the best advice anyone ever gave you?**

My marketing professor at the University of Johannesburg told me, "Don't chase money, do what interests you and challenges you. Success and everything else will follow!".

▣ **What advice do you have for the future generation of women wanting to get into the tech space?**

Don't be put off by stereotypes, the tech industry is so diverse, ranging from coding, services and hardware like smartphones. With the rise of social media, services like Uber and Airbnb – the tech industry offers a multitude of opportunities for women.

You don't necessarily need to be from a tech background to add value to a tech company.

“ *I came from a FMCG background and was able to add value to a 'tech' company with the experience and knowledge I gained from the FMCG sector.* ”

Consumer-centricity is at the heart of most companies. It takes a bit of time to understand the products and the technical side, but it wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. I would attribute adaptability and a bit of determination as being keys to success.

■ Who or what is your biggest motivation?

My husband and especially my four-year-old daughter. I feel like everything I do is to be able to set the best example for her. Showing her not only what success looks like but also how to deal with failure and making them learning moments and not defining moments.

■ As a female business leader, what's the least and most exciting aspect of your workday?

The most exciting part of my current days (remember I said no one day looks the same) is launching our new Nokia smartphones. I'm always amazed by the level of innovation and ability of smartphones today versus a decade ago.

I don't actually have a least favourite part of my workday, as I don't see what I do as a job but rather a passion that helps me gain more knowledge in a mobile-led digital economy – an economy I place a lot of importance in as it will be one which my daughter will need to navigate as she gets older.

■ Could you list a few, if any, specific challenges females face in this industry?

For many women, their ambitions for promotion and career advancement are hampered by their desire to have a family. According to a recent PwC survey of 3,600 professional women, 42% feel nervous about the impact that starting a family could have on their career. I see this as one of the key challenges women perceive there to be. I know I felt this way before starting my family.

■ What is your advice for overcoming these challenges?

I feel one of the strengths women have is creative problem-solving and the ability to manage and organise multiple tasks simultaneously.

“ I know I always look to find more efficient ways of doing things and increasing productivity in order to balance time at work, versus time with family. ”

Time management is important for me to increase quality time with my family. Setting clear tasks for each day and planning my week in advance. Getting to the office straight after dropping my daughter at school, forgoing tea and lunch breaks and opting for a quick bite to eat. This allows me to leave the office by 4pm and get home to make dinner and spend time with my family. After putting my daughter to bed at 7pm with a story, I can then finish up any outstanding actions for the day, but this is the exception rather than the rule.



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One of the positives of technology is mobility and the ability to work from anywhere. I also attribute the ability to balance my work and home life by working for a company like HMD Global, which is people-centric and affords equal opportunity for all.

This was most evident when I was afforded the opportunity to present at the Mobile World Congress in 2017, as part of the official global launch of Nokia smartphones on Android. Together with my colleague, we were one of the few and youngest females to be on stage.

■ What trends do you predict in tech in the coming years?

Not sure I can predict any new trends that the trend gurus haven't already published. But one of the trends I'm looking forward to is the advancement of IoT (Internet of Things) related to the connected home and it being more commercially available to everyone. Where if I forget my grocery list at home, my fridge could send a list to my phone and the local grocer and the groceries could be delivered before I get home from work.

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