

#BehindtheMask with... Bonga Mpungose, new business director at Fresh AF

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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This week, as part of our #YouthMonth feature, we go behind the mask with Bonga Mpungose, new business director at Fresh AF.



"Don't judge a face by it's mask..."

1. So tell us, what's really behind your mask (literally and/or figuratively speaking).

Behind the mask is a young man constantly caught up in between two worlds. The one is getting entrenched with youth culture and keeping up with millennials while the other is sitting in boardrooms and being able to connect these two worlds together in a meaningful way that creates value for both, while also entrepreneurially as a business making a dime from it too.

It involves not just understanding the 'wave' but also being a part of it and being able to authentically articulate this to corporate marketing managers and decision makers to essentially help them better creatively engage with and win this very hard to please group of consumers.

2. Where are you locked down?

I'm at my bachelor studio apartment in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. It's a very cool new 'artsy-fartsy' development for young working professionals who are a bit established but not really looking to settle down as yet. Most residents around here still just honestly want to explore, travel the world and just live their best lives. That's just the vibe here, and I love it.

3. How are you finding working from home or physical distancing at the office?

It's actually been quite interesting for me to be honest. Look, there's a certain uniformity and sense of equality that comes with working together at the same office, which makes us ignorant to the fact that we each come from very different backgrounds.

I think what working from home has done personally for me is make me conscious of the fact that this is not necessarily the case and it's important as a leader to individually take time to understand the different circumstances my subordinates and employees come from and be sensitive and considerate of these varied circumstances and find ways to navigate around these and not apply a one-size-fits-all mentality or approach.

We've had to deal with data struggles and connectivity issues while ensuring employees stay as equally motivated in delivering on their allocated tasks without supervision, which comes with being at the office from a work moral perspective, and which is quite tricky when working remotely.

I have, however, on a lighter note experienced a lot of much-needed humour during Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams and Zoom meetings where people just don't seem to understand the importance of keeping yourself muted during meetings when you aren't the one speaking. Nobody is trying to hear what's going on in your background fam!

4. Describe a typical workday, if such a thing exists.

A typical day starts with a morning meditation followed by a cup of ginger tea. It just always slaps different in the mornings. This is then followed by catching up on emails. The best thing I did towards the end of last year was signing up with Google Mail tracker, which basically informs me on who has read my emails and who hasn't. It works just like WhatsApp with one tick for unread and two blue ticks for read. It's a tool I'd highly recommend if you're in sales.

This is shortly followed by finding new leads and coming up with new creative ideas and pitches to try win new business. Being a business owner makes it next to impossible to switch off, as this process can go on until the early hours of the morning. I try to take much-needed naps in between though to keep productivity levels on a high.

A glass or two or three of Coke, coffee and sometimes Monster energy drink, if I can't get MoFaya, are an essential part of my work life to keep awake and going. Money never sleeps so I don't see a reason why I should, especially at this point in my career where things are really beginning to blossom. I say this because brands are finally listening to what we have to say as credible culture plugs very much in tune with urban street culture and what's needed to influence consumer purchase decisions, more specifically Gen Z.

We have for the longest time had to deal with agencies and middlemen but have pushed right to the front door and created opportunities for us to deal directly with marketing managers to nurture and build on those direct relationships. We've done really amazing work in the last few months for brands like Steers on the [Steers 'Hit A Lick' video content series](#). Go check out the campaign on YouTube. This was our concept from ideation to execution and we're fortunate to have a direct relationship with them.



Gen-Z creatives influencing urban youth culture in 2020

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We also did a really exciting campaign with Budweiser called '[Bud King Of The Decks](#)', which was our brainchild from ideation to executing the entire thing. We enjoy a very fruitful relationship with them and are constantly looking for ways to help them push boundaries and find ways to get them immersed in South African 'cool' culture and have a bigger share of voice in that space.

We are also doing really amazing work for DSTV and formed a part of the launching of their popular *Gomora* TV show. These are all direct relationships and we are fortunate to be operating in a space where brands are able to trust and directly brief us now.

We cannot take this for granted as it wasn't always the case and therefore we cannot afford to get comfortable. Instead we are working very hard at acquiring new clients and new business through proactive pitches and even more so now during lockdown.

5. How do you maintain a good rapport with your teammates/clients?

Well, with clients the only way to maintain good rapport is by giving them kick-ass work. Constantly over-deliver on KPIs, and they'll always come back with new briefs. We run a very lean team comprised of very cool smart young people whom I get to learn a lot from and with who I try to keep in contact with even outside of work, more importantly now during lockdown where everything is happening virtually. This makes for great rapport building.

6. How do you socialise these days?

I don't unless it's taking walks around our residential complex or nearby grocery store just to get a breath of fresh air and see people. It's tough... Hahaha!

7. What do you do to keep fit, healthy and sane (physically/mentally)?

I wish I could say I exercise, which I've been meaning to since even before lockdown. I do, however, spend a lot of time-consuming spiritually uplifting and inspirational content to just stay sane and motivated.

Discovering new music from random SoundCloud unknown artists also does wonders for me in keeping my vibrations up. Exposing myself to new frequencies and sounds allows for paradigm shifts and creates new thought patterns and new ways to approach and solve problems, and just generally a fresh perspective to how one views things.

8. What new apps would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

You'll find AKA TV downloaded a few weeks ago. I love how music artists are moving away from just being artists to becoming business people who are taking ownership of their own brands and finding new ways to monetise their popularity and following. AKA TV is essentially that, a subscription-based content streaming platform owned by AKA the rapper/music artist.

9. Share your favourite Covid-19/lockdown-related meme with us.

**Quarantine is temporary,
drip is forever**



10. What is the first thing you plan to do when the lockdown lifts?

Well, we are at Level 3 right now, which allows for a bit more movement. I have a trip planned for Nigeria, which I had planned on doing in October. It's the first thing I plan on doing as soon as we are allowed to travel.

11. Describe your career and if/how the pandemic/lockdown has affected its course.

We've been preaching the digital gospel and thanks to Covid-19, they are finally ready to listen. Fresh AF at its core is a digital content creator. We've got three of our very own digital publications, which cater to various audiences and the business of it is monetising the audiences we have on these platforms.

The days of just selling display banner ads or advertorials is becoming a thing of the past. Yes, clients still do, depending on the kind of campaign and KPIs, and display still works if you are only just looking for reach, but it's not necessarily advisable if you are looking for engagements.

Consumers get annoyed with advertising just popping up on their screens and, therefore, it has become extremely important for us as publishers and agencies to become innovative in how we do this.

Video for us has become an area we are heavily invested in and believe is the future. Zkhiphani is one of our most progressive platforms and allows us to experiment. We are already slowly transforming that platform into a VOD site, which we are gearing to compete with some of the biggest global VOD sites, like your Netflix, Amazon Prime's, Hulu, etc., and what will set us apart is our very unique content offering.

Clients are now pushed to spend bigger chunks of their budgets on digital because of Covid-19 and, therefore, for us, our business hasn't been affected much. Instead, things are getting more exciting because we are pushed to become even more creative with our offerings.

“ To a degree Covid-19 is the ‘great equaliser’ because it’s only the most creative ideas and your willingness to be proactive and knock on client doors that will win you business. ”

12. Any companies/brands that you feel have responded particularly well to the crisis and/or Covid-19-related campaigns that stand out to you, and why?

The one campaign that has stood out is the Chicken Licken 'Everyone's Talking About It' campaign. Oh man, I envy the work Joe Public is currently doing on that campaign. I look at that and think, 'Damn, I wish we came up with that!' Hahaha...

There is that famous *Generations* scene with Tau Mogale and Karabo Moroka arguing and how they've taken a piece of content that most South African middle class can relate to because of how iconic the scene was and created a parody out of it, is amazing! So when Covid-19 hit and consumers couldn't get Chicken Licken, they switched up the scene to make it relevant to the current climate and it still worked incredibly well. I looked at that and thought, 'Wow, this is really cool!'

13. What are you working on right now?

We're about to start a campaign for a blue-chip investment and insurance company that has created really cool video content and we are helping them get it to the right audience. We've also just pitched some really cool stuff for a satellite TV broadcaster we are hoping will start rolling out at the start of July, and a bunch of other really cool stuff still in the pipeline.

14. What does the 'new normal' look like to you?

In the movie, *The Social Network*, a 2010 American biographical drama film based on Mark Zuckerberg, Sean Parker is quoted saying: "We lived on farms, then we lived in cities, and now we're going to live on the internet!" As fictional as the movie was, hearing him quote that 10 years ago already shifted my mind to gear up for that inevitable reality, which is a life where we would live on the internet.

Covid-19 has just accelerated that reality. I personally think it's a reality I'm over-prepared for. Look, we've spent the last decade building an online business with the hope that it will become more valuable in the future as more and more people migrate online and become reliant on the internet as a means to do everything.

"The newnormal for me is a world where we're being pushed back to simplicity by cutting down on all the unnecessary. I'm loving this 'newnormal', as we call it."

15. What are some of the buzzwords floating around at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself?

"I'm 'Gucci' bro." Urban street colloquial, meaning I'm good.

16. What advice would you give to other industry folk during this time?

Well, it's as simple as adapt or die, as cliché as that may sound, it has never been more relevant.

Follow Mpungose on [Facebook](#), [Instagram bonga_mpungose](#) and/or [Twitter @_BongaMpungose](#).

*Interviewed by [Jessica Tennant](#).

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