

Black Coffee Films - first black-owned and only black director-based company in Cape Town

By  Juanita Pienaar

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**Note that due to an unforeseen conflict, Black Coffee Films have rebranded their company and are now known as Blacklist Films.*



Amanda Dlamini (producer-partner) and David Leite (founder and partner) at Black Coffee Films.

After the drought of 2018 struck Cape Town, having lasting repercussions for the South African film service industry, the Black Coffee team went back to the drawing board, as a 'crisis' is just another word for 'opportunity'. They wanted to create something, not just impactful, but a reflection of South African creatives and a space to grow new creative voices.

In late 2019, director Shamiel "Soni-eyes" Soni brought his wealth of knowledge and experience to the table and lit a new fire in the team. Once the team was assembled, it was time to get some of the best emerging talent in South Africa and abroad. Using their collective force, these power-brewers now bring us Black Coffee Films.

We spoke to Amanda Dlamini (producer-partner) and David Leite (founder and partner) at Black Coffee Films, about the company's launch, how their startup has tried to represent black directors in the country and how they're consciously adding female and young directors to their roster.

■ **Let's start with the basics. Talk us through the context of launching Black Coffee Films during lockdown?**

Black Coffee Films has been in the pipeline for us since 2016. The current Covid-19 pandemic presented a path to make this a reality. It seemed that the lockdown helped us focus more to align our vision.



Brave new world: (Once the lockdown's over the shooting begins)

Ian Gabriel 29 Apr 2020



■ **How did you come up with the name?**

The name 'Black Coffee Films' was a team effort. David currently also owns the only black-owned international line production company in Cape Town. This came from working for almost a decade abroad where eventually he was encouraged to return home to create With Milk Films. Now with the inception of Black Coffee Films, housed in the same building, answering the phone was made easier, "Hello Black Coffee With Milk, how can we direct your call?" But seriously, we wanted to identify with being bold and strong and the black being our core value.

📊 **Describe the model.**

- Progressive
- Visionary
- Transformative
- Storytelling

Ideally, we would receive a call from an advertising agency or client directly, then enter into a bid with a treatment created by one of our directors; supported with planning and budget from one of our producers. Should our bid win, we then take the project through the phases from pre-production, production and then finally post-production and package it for delivery back to the agency or broadcaster for distribution online or on television.

📊 **Explain how you're driving transformation or youth development.**

We are part of an ever-transforming industry landscape. However, we found time and time again that there was little transformation 'behind the scenes'. We have made an effort to not only represent the black, talented directors South Africa has to offer but have been conscious to add female and young directors on our roster. Of our eight directors, we have two female directors and three junior directors.

“ These particular groups are often overlooked, under-exposed and an untapped talent class. We hope to expose them through our relationships with global leaders. Moulding not only strong characters and stories but also giving those in need opportunities to explore something new, helping them fall in love with the industry. ”



City of Cape Town pledges to grow and transform the film industry

26 Jul 2018



📊 **What barriers have you had to overcome to get the business to where it is today?**

Our first step was to find five top to mid-level directors who believed in our concept. Next, we had to grow a social platform to bring awareness not only to our new brand but also to the gap that existed within the industry. We do anticipate more challenges ahead; startups are always looked down on in a disparaging way. Some may believe that new comes without experience, and this could not be further from the truth. We have decades of combined experience on the production side and a wealth of creative genius from our directors. We are well-positioned and have tonnes of industry contacts already both on the supplier side and also the agencies.

There was little that could have prepared us for the changes that have come with the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been a testing time and has had us thinking on our feet, for new and innovative ways to approach our work. We must commend associations in the media production industry for swiftly putting in place regulations that we hope to keep as standard practice for our sets.

📊 **What are you most proud of and why?**

Being the first black-owned and only black director-based company in Cape Town is empowering. With a fierce production team and imaginative directors, we believe the meeting of these two forces has created unique and exciting opportunities for our company, and we hope to be sharing some of our progress soon.

📺 **What's next? Your vision for the business?**

We have our sights on expanding into feature films and television in Africa. We have also entered talks with a global advertising agency (no names mentioned) and we are now tackling how to take a black-owned, all-black director-based production company to a global market, and the response has been overwhelming.

The sky is the limit with strong stories and strong direction. Black Coffee Films.

For more information, connect with them on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)

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ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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