

Diving over the Digital Edge: Lucia Maseko, John Gevisser & Glenn Gillis

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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This year's Digital Edge speaker line-up is impressive. We spoke to three of this year's speakers, each inspiring in their own way...

Take Lucia Maseko, the EMENA Regional Digital Champion or Lead at Nestlé. She feels women should be celebrated all the time, and that awareness of equality should be prevalent all the time, people should be reminded constantly that we as women are great and in every way capable. And even though a glass ceiling does exist for women, she feels you have a choice to whether it defines your future/destiny - she chooses to break the glass ceiling.

Or take John Gevisser, CEO of Gamma Fly, South Africa's first Gamification Software Development software-as-a-service company. He also set up Pearson's New Entertainment divisions UK national sales network and delivered SA's first internet shopping mall for MWeb while creating the largest server-based gaming operation in the world, BetStone. With his commercial background in media and gaming Gevisser is entrepreneurially driven, and definitely tech-savvy.

Then there's Glenn Gillis, Managing Director of Sea Monster Entertainment, one of South Africa's pre-eminent animation, gaming and augmented reality companies. He has a Business Science degree from UCT and has been a senior executive, consultant and entrepreneur with growing, knowledge intensive businesses for over 20 years. He's also the co-founder and chair of Relate, a social trust that has provided R25m worth of employment opportunities and donations for other good causes, by making 1 million beaded bracelets in three years.



Maseko, Gevisser, Gillis

Who better to share some insights into how all things digital have changed life as we know it?

 **1. Let's focus on the importance of digital - is there anything you can think of that doesn't benefit from digital/tech innovation?**

Maseko: Nothing at all!

Gevisser: Privacy. Traditional hierarchies. Writing cursive. Funerals.

Gillis: No, everything is better with digital... but seriously, of course digital is just a means-to-an-end, a delivery platform and a catch-all phrase that in itself can be sometimes useful and sometimes meaningless. Ultimately it's about the experience, and how to drive the business or social outcome using the most appropriate digital and technical platforms.

■ 2. Explain the concept of digital storytelling, the backbone of any marketing today.

Maseko: I think we should always remember that there's always the story and then the platform on which we deliver our stories. We should try not get caught up in the platform as we tend to lose the story and want to change the story to suit the platform. The concepts/ideas are the elements that are important in building that narrative for a brand, I believe with time that narrative always evolves as the ideas change or as the brand story grows. Storytelling is about connectivity and the digital space allows a dialogue to happen within that story.

Gevisser: With all games, the games field of play allows the player a certain flexibility to determine the pace and velocity of the story of what happens - albeit within the confines of the rule set. Think chess -when on the attack, I can move my pawn in three different ways, but I determine the ways. Digital games have given the player much more ability to determine the flow of the story. As gamification uses game designs (components, mechanics and dynamics) to establish and engage participants in corporate programs, storytelling is the primary driver of this engagement.

Gillis: Stories are how people have always made sense of the world around them, and now more than ever, we need to find new narratives. As people struggle to deal with increasing complexity and an unrelenting stream of noise in their lives, we need to find ways to effectively compete in the attention economy. Whether this is to grow brands, create entertaining experiences or drive learning outcomes, the essence of successful communication has always been great stories, with engaging characters.

Specifically, as technology has given greater power to consumers to express themselves, brands need to shift their thinking away from one-sided, "shouty" communication to embracing the new realities that digital media bring. Whether we call it content marketing or digital storytelling, the reality is that people want information and experiences that are relevant, add value and are entertaining.

■ 3. List the three digital innovations that have changed your life.

Gevisser: GPS (Uber is nothing without it), access/availability/democracy of information, and autonomy (of drones).

Gillis: The Apple interface and design language prove that things can become simpler and more intuitive over time. At Sea Monster we're also big believers in augmented reality (and hopefully now virtual reality) to deliver engaging, contextual experiences. The power of mobile devices to deliver gaming and other experiences where we want them and how we want them.

■ 4. Is SA - and the rest of the continent - on par when it comes to global digital innovation? Share your thoughts!

Maseko: There are no borders to digital so in this case there shouldn't be any in measuring digital innovation. The journeys are different... We have created so many innovations on the continent that have changed lives, and that is what matters the most. Innovations that can change people's lives for the better.

Gevisser: Practically we are not on a par, mainly due to access of services, which is as much about the pipes and devices as it is about the cost. However, there are parts of SA and Africa that are right up there. Take the issue of 'access' as an example. If you sit with a big pipe in Johannesburg, you can access anything that the net has to offer. If you sit in Gugulethu, you may not have the big pipe, but you could have a smartphone, and have the same access, albeit slower. Stellenbosch has made access pretty widespread and it's free, but Stellenbosch isn't Timbuktu, and it ain't Orange Farm. Without access, innovation sits in a darkened room. Our data in SA is some of the most expensive in the world, which makes accessibility even more difficult. But with delivery of USSD services, SMS technology, digital mobile wallets, banking, our feature phones are right up there with the best in world. Not just in SA, but also East Africa. And when it comes to social aggregation and utilisation of digital innovation: The Arab Spring started in Tunisia...

Gillis: Yes, we can certainly compete with the best of Africa and the world. Clearly though we have a challenging economic and political environment, and on a good day this drives our creativity and ability to deliver relevant, practical solutions. On a bad day it can lower everyone's appetite for risk, lead to mediocre, same-same outcomes and not allow for the big bold investments that are needed to drive big bold outcomes.

■ 5. *Who are your personal inspirations/mentors?*

Maseko: I'm inspired by so many people in my space in different ways. I allow myself to be inspired in the smallest ways to keep that light burning. My mother is my greatest source of personal inspiration, not forgetting my aunt Maud Motanyane and the late Gugu Radebe Akpata. These women have always had my front, back and side.

Gevisser: All the South Africans who are pushing the digital boundaries internationally - in the performance arts, like Goldfish and Jeremy Loops; art, like William Kentridge and Nandapho Mtambo; innovation, like Elon Musk; palaeontology, like the late Philip Tobias and now Lee Berger; and politics, like Mandela. My children also count as they have an ability to work digital with the intuitive nature that I wish I had. This applies especially to digital music production.

Gillis: I am quite opposed to the celebrity culture... being a great author doesn't necessarily make you an authority on human rights, for example. I'm a huge admirer though of anyone who can rise above their current circumstances to look beyond the obvious and redefine the questions or challenges. I admire the Arch Tutu and Thuli Madonsela for asking the hard questions, and my brother, Arthur Gillis, who started Protea Hotels and built it into the biggest hotel group in Africa. They hold the characteristics of true leaders.

■ 6. *Who's getting it right in terms of digital at the moment?*

Maseko: For me it's campaign-specific: Uber, Oreo, Dove, and sports brands on their collaborations in the digital space: Nike, Adidas, Puma.

Gevisser: Digital music production suites like Ableton, as well as Amazon, Reading, AWS, drones... it just makes sense.

Gillis: That's a hard one to answer without getting involved in the politics of digital media. Clearly Naspers is using its size to its advantage and showing us how to build global businesses to compete with the best media companies anywhere. Similarly, I'm inspired by Pep and how they're disrupting the smart phone market, to bring access to many more people.

■ 7. *What are you most looking forward to from Digital Edge Live?*

Maseko: The stories! Females in particular can benefit from continuously telling their story and owning the narrative of that story.

Gevisser: How our own stories can intersect and help each other find and map new and future chapters... hearing what great things our dynamic and vibrant people are doing here. Listening.

Gillis: Really loving the format, and the opportunity to learn from and share experiences with so many incredible thought leaders in our industry. And of course to hear from Spike Lee, one of the greatest storytellers of our age.

Seems the Spike Lee excitement is a common point no matter your specialty. [Click here](#) for more on this year's Nedbank Digital Edge Live line-up, taking place on 9 September 2015 at the Sandton Convention Centre. Visit <http://www.thedigitaledge.co.za/> to secure your booking and [here for insights](#) from other speakers on this year's programme.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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