

ACA CEO Mathe Okaba

 By Jessica Tennant

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Following Mathe Okaba's appointment as CEO of the Association for Communication and Advertising (ACA) a few months back, we thought we'd find out how she's getting on in her new position...

■ How do you feel about being appointed CEO of the ACA?

I was really excited to come back into the industry after so many years, especially in a role that can impact change on a large scale.

“ I am not a believer of ‘a newbroom sweeps cleaner’ because when things work, let them be and enhance them. ”

A great job was done by my predecessor (Odette van der Haar) but there is an overall expectation of what's next for the ACA. I'll be in a better position to answer that after my '100 days'.



Mathe Okaba



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That said, I have very specific goals that I will be working toward as I embark on my journey to create an even better and stronger representative body for the South African advertising profession, namely:

- A visible and increased awareness of the ACA among all stakeholders, from industry-level through to the marketing fraternity.
- An operational Sector Council with the help of government.
- Establishing transformation goals that are achievable by our industry.
- Retention of talent for our industry.
- To highlight advertising and communication as an option to high school learners on the cusp of making career choices, and to their parents, who are – to use an industry buzzword – influencers.

■ What do you love most about your career and advertising in particular?

I love the freedom to explore, test and make mistakes. The energy of young people is also electrifying. In my role, I am involved in all aspects of advertising and ensuring the growth and sustainability of the industry is challenging but immensely rewarding.

Advertising informs and guides consumers on their path to purchase. It drives social action. It has the ability to shift and

create culture. It delivers creative brilliance based on strategic insight, which ultimately delivers on the bottom line of clients. What's there not to love?

“ When I look back one day on what I've achieved, I would love to see an industry that has grown, that is inclusive and supportive to newplayers in the market. ”

■ **You're currently studying towards your MBA at the University of Roehampton (UoR) in the UK. Tell us about this experience, what you got out of it and how you believe this has equipped you for this new role.**

My UoR experience is through distance learning. My masters aptly prepared me for this role since the course material is reflective of what is required in my job. However, I don't believe that is the only element that has prepared and equipped me. My experience within the industry and the commitment to my work are also key factors in ensuring that I deliver as a CEO and on the mandate of the ACA.

■ **Tell us a bit about your experience in the industry in general; any highlights you're particularly proud of?**

I started my career in the ad industry in 1995 as a trainee strategist for Grey but I found a new passion while working there and chose to become a media planner/buyer. I moved on to HerdBuoys McCann Erickson as media group head and then onto McCann Erickson NY on the Jean Kummel Scholarship. This is probably one of my proudest achievements. It provided me with the opportunity to gain valuable global strategy learnings. I then had a stint at Starcom as a media strategist.

I left the ad industry to explore opportunities on the client side, with a 10-year stint at the SABC where my team and I created Espresso on SABC 3. This is another highlight if I look back at my achievements. After that, I spent some time in the financial services industry.

The experience garnered across both the agency and client side has helped ensure I have a full understanding of the needs of both.

■ **What are you most looking forward to?**

I look forward to completely immersing myself into the industry, delivering on the ACA's mandate and achieving the goals set at this time. Beyond that, extending and focusing on my understanding and knowledge of the importance of the ACA in order to provide greater value to the industry, and of course, ensuring increased inclusivity and growing the ACA's membership.

■ **What's at the top of your to-do list?**

My number one priority is member engagement to ensure we are future fit to retain our relevance to the industry.



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■ **What are you currently reading/watching/listening to for work?**

I'm currently watching *The Dark Net* and *Cybercrimes*, both for personal pleasure and professional development reasons. I'm a huge Ted fan with my favourite thus far being *How Africa can keep rising* by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. Right now, I'm watching *Talks* by strong women leaders – insightful, powerful, but most of all inspirational to the max.

■ ***Tell us something about yourself not generally known?***

I have a love and fear for the sea. I have my scuba license and I have dived a few times but yet again, I am afraid of the sea because of its power, force and magnitude, but I have respect for its beauty.

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