

# "PR is creative!" - Lebo Madiba, Ogilvy PR's new managing partner

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Lebo Madiba was recently appointed managing partner: Public Relations and Influence at Ogilvy Johannesburg and is looking forward to convincing all the creative energy that lies within the agency that PR should be considered as creative.

"I am beyond thrilled about the new role," said Madiba. "Ogilvy is among the most respected PR agencies in the country, with an impressive client list that requires sophisticated levels of service. I can't wait to get started, particularly now when digital transformation is driving much-desired change in the industry. I'm looking forward to the challenge and making a real difference for our clients."

Here, she tells us why she's excited to be back in the agency space again and about her career journey thus far...

## **How do you feel about your appointment?**

It is exciting! It's a good time to be back in the agency space again. I ran my own PR agency for six years from 2011 to 2017. Three years into it, I began to sense that there was a big shift in what clients were looking for from an agency. Whilst traditional PR and reputation management were still a priority, the need for digital integration, particularly for corporate and B2B clients who have never really been customer facing, was bubbling. Social media had given everyone a voice, which meant that every client, no matter which sector they operated in, was vulnerable.



Lebo Madiba

When an opportunity to be insourced into a corporate B2B environment by one of my clients came about, I took it up, as it was going to give me a front-row view of what happens on the client side. Being CMO meant that I was at the coalface of understanding the business challenges that keep the CEO and CFO up at night and how strategic communications can help address these challenges, and the transformation into the digital space. This wasn't just in terms of managing reputation online, but also aligning the organisation to digital communications that are more geared towards sales and lead generation.

That experience for me was currency. The kind that builds an intuitive PR and influence practice that does not only engage at brand level, but understands commerce and helps the agency and the client build brands that matter.

My journey back into agency had to be with an organisation that I felt is ready to transition PR and core PR clients into digital and social. The use of content and social specifically for PR clients is evolving, and what better place to be able to lead that trend than at Ogilvy. It is one of the most respected advertising and marketing agencies in the country, with an impressive client list that requires sophisticated levels of service. I am looking forward to the challenge and making a real difference for our clients.

## **Tell us a bit about your experience, what you bring to the team and what you hope to achieve in your new position.**

It's a mix of experience. I have worked in PR for over 20 years of my career, across various disciplines that

include technology, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, aviation, consumer, sports, financial services and banking, and sports sponsorships, amongst others.

I have spent the last two years as group CMO of a digital technology business, which was hugely insightful. It offered me a glimpse into the not-so-far future and the fourth industrial revolution in practice.



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I am a content enthusiast and probably one of few people that still consume newspapers because at the centre of what we do in communications is content. The mix of PR and content for me is a winner in the age that we are in. Social has changed the landscape, and what we previously thought about PR has also changed because consumption patterns are changing, as attitudes and lifestyles change.

Individuals don't just see themselves in terms of their demographics or as target markets, but as individuals with unique needs and desires. They know what they want and are very clear about it. They know what they expect from brands and want these expectations to be met in an authentic way. Therefore, tolerance for deviation is very low. Doing these right builds customer loyalty.

In the same breath, brands still want to have the space to communicate what is important to them.

*“ In my view, content is the bridge. If used effectively, the core PR skills and capability allows us to strategically use content to create awareness, manage reputation and build credibility. The same content, packaged differently with relevancy and with an element of newsworthiness, can drive engagement and shareability, without the corporate speak. ”*

This is a passion point that I am hoping to bring to the team. It is already here. We have a content hub that looks after creative, social and content that sits within the PR and influence team. I am looking forward to working with them to grow and nurture this practice.

■ ***What excites you most about joining the company?***

That I have been given the space to explore and have access to Ogilvy's global network. We have so much capital sitting across the agency around the world, which I think will be a base to tap into to extract concepts and ideas, which will be great for the South African market.

■ ***What do you love most about your career and your areas of specialisation in particular?***

I have had a great career and have done everything that I love, amidst all the changes that are happening around us. I still get a kick out of media relations and I love a good crisis. Crisis reputation is a constant reminder of why I am in PR.

■ ***Any career highlights you're particularly proud of?***

Running my own practice and attracting the types of clients that we had on our books, for me, was a huge endorsement and will always stand out.

From a client delivery perspective, I have done some amazing work in the pharmaceutical industry, which is so highly regulated. Being able to cut through the red tape on a client like Novo Nordisk, a pharmaceutical company that specialises in diabetes, is a career highlight.

In the five years of working with the client, we were able to push the creative envelope. We ran various initiatives that included: recording a song and music video with South African artist Howza Mosese, who is a person living with diabetes; going on to record a client-funded music video with the Soweto Gospel Choir shortly after their first Grammy Award; hosting a diabetes awareness concert in the middle of Mary Fitzgerald Square in Johannesburg, featuring Howza and some really well-known South African music groups; producing a recipe book working with well-known chef Dorah Sitole in collaboration with Sue Allen, shortly after she was runner-up of Masterchef SA; and the development and management of the Novo Nordisk Cycle for Diabetes; a 48-hour cycling relay ride from Johannesburg to Cape Town. Anyone that has worked in pharmaceuticals will tell you that this was no easy feat, but most important was the new opportunities available to the client because of our PR and marketing efforts, which I will forever be proud of.



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

PR is creative! I am looking forward to convincing all the creative energy that lies within Ogilvy of this. I think that it is a good challenge to give to myself. Getting it right will be pure joy!

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

Getting to know my team. I have a huge interest in people and their stories and getting the best out of them from understanding what makes them tick. It is a big team, but I am spending the next few weeks 'speed dating' each of them. Top of the list is to find our winning formula based on mutual respects of each other's abilities. It is said that you are only as good as your team.

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

I am reading a pocket booklet from #OgilvyChange, a behavioural practice within the agency, titled *Influences and Irrationalities of a Human Mind* and *The Innovator's DNA: Mastering the Five Skills of Disruptive Innovators* by Clayton M. Christensen, Hal B. Gregersen and Jeff Dyer.

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