

# Esther Hoogstad steers Spree's customer journey



By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Newly appointed as head of customer interaction and marketing at Spree, Esther Hoogstad will be taking charge of the online retailer's end to end customer experience. Thriving in customer-centric roles, Dutch-born Hoogstad was responsible for shaping the omnichannel strategy for Nike Direct in Europe by bringing offline and online retail together into a seamless consumer journey across the different touchpoints.



Esther Hoogstad

Working at the multinational corporation for 10 years, she began as a retail development manager. After a 2-year assignment in Johannesburg as the World Cup 2010 programme manager, she then went on to take the role of retail operations director for Central Eastern Europe, leading a team that was in charge of opening the first owned Nike outlets in Turkey and Russia.

More recently, Hoogstad lead a cross-functional team based out of the Netherlands and Spain for the start of a new Online Affiliate model with Football Club Barcelona – whereby Nike became the dedicated online partner for the club. She also worked at BP International for five years focusing on establishing their convenience retail offering across the Netherlands, by developing a direct supply chain model and forming new partnerships with

third-party logistics and suppliers.

With a knack for shaping the customer experience in a holistic manner, Hoogstad says she's at her most inspired working in an environment with a strong team ethic where cross-functional collaboration, employee recognition and overall organisational transparency are priorities.

Recently relocating to Cape Town from the Netherlands with her family, she says she's excited to embrace the diversity of South Africa and its people.

Here, Hoogstad shares insight into her new role and the evolving demands of being a customer-centric business in 2018.

■ ***Congrats on your new appointment! As Spree's new head of customer interaction and marketing, what does your role involve?***

Thanks a lot! I'm responsible for the end to end customer experience which entails:

- 1) Building brand awareness for Spree's digital marketing channels by inviting customers to our platforms,
- 2) facilitating their experience and journey on our platforms and,
- 3) last but not least: managing the way we engage with our customers throughout this journey, and building services and products that make them come back and talk about us with great passion.

■ ***What are you looking most forward to in your new position, and what is your biggest challenge?***

I'm looking most forward to working with the diverse and skilled teams around me. Spree hosts a real entrepreneurial "can-do" mentality which is very exciting for me coming from a larger organisation before. As we're such a lean team, with an end to end in-house operation and supply chain, our biggest challenge lies in the way we structure and optimize our systems to support our growth and the different marketing activities we'd like to deploy in the future.



### ▣ **What do you hope to contribute to South Africa's e-commerce sector?**

I would like to help elevate the overall experience by offering Spree's customers a premium product choice, meaningful experiences and flexibility in the way they shop. We're looking to improve the discoverability of Spree through a mobile-first strategy, and widening the menu of delivery and return options. Getting even faster to market in the big urban areas, whilst offering new pick-up and drop-off options in the outlying areas – to ensure all customer bases in SA are served.

All players in this market are learning from each other and want to grow their online presence to make it even more easy, stable and intuitive for the SA consumer to shop online.



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### ▣ **How has the importance of being a 'customer-centric business' evolved over the last decade?**

Through the rapid growth of digital, and more importantly mobile, all players in the market need to rethink how they put the customer first in each part of their business. Direct to consumer is the way forward. Brands won't survive with a purely B2C or wholesale approach, they'll need to distinguish themselves in a unique way on what value they offer to their customer's life. The rise of social media and peer to peer engagement allow customers to pick up instantly on any flaw they encounter.

In summary, it will make us all have to work harder to meet the ever increasing customer demands day in, day out – learn from it in an agile way and ensure the customer connection through digital channels is prioritized at all times.

### ▣ **What industry trends do you predict for 2018?**

Predictive analytics to understand and predict customer behaviour.

Tools to help optimize search, becoming more strategic on how to attract new customers and be surgical on where to spend paid acquisition budgets.

Customised product offerings, content and messaging for each customer (segment).

Platform innovations to allow for a two-way interaction with customers like our recently launched [visual search tool](#), [SpreeSnap](#). Turning customer and influencer feeds and content into stories that others draw inspiration and fashion advice from.



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### ▣ *What are you currently reading, watching or listening to for work?*

There are many insightful conferences – one that I’m looking forward to is the SA annual township marketing summit in May. I also read trend blogs and customer insight reports from US, Europe and Africa.

### ▣ *What has been your most valuable business lesson?*

Evolve immediately - growth doesn’t happen by plotting out the perfect strategy on the long term and then waiting for *the* moment to go all in, but by deploying tactics each week/month and closely monitoring the “end to end impact” of these tactics. It’s vital to ensure all teams are empowered, adaptive, and processes are agile enough to make modifications accordingly.

In a nutshell: the Kaizen philosophy about nurturing change in little steps - at the right pace and time.

## ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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