

Josephine Buys, in her own words

This past Women's Month we've once again been reminded just how much society as a whole needs to correct the many injustices women continue to endure, just because of their gender.



Josephine Buys

One way we can do this is to profile successful women who excel at what they do so they can be held up as beacons of light and role models to others. To give women the hope that, whatever their personal circumstances, they too can navigate the obstacles they face and claim their rightful place in their chosen field.

The South African Publisher Research Council (PRC) is headed up by a woman who has the vision, tenacity and drives to succeed in a fractured world. Interviewed by Kim Browne, this is her story...

■ ***In your own words, who is the woman, Josephine Buys?***

I was made in Ireland, born in London, came to South Africa for a year when I turned 21 and never left! I am optimistic, punctual, forthright, dedicated, a mentor, a mentee, a slow cyclist and a logophile.

■ ***Tell us about some of your career highlights. What led you to become CEO of the PRC and what do you want to achieve in your position?***

I joined my first publishing house, Avonwold on Baker Street in Rosebank, selling classified ads in a building and décor directory. This was my first experience of what would become my career fix: Media pioneering, in this case, launching new titles.

From national sales manager at the launch of GQ South Africa, I careered up to advertising sales director of *FHM* during the peak of its highest circulations and ad revenues, before leaving for Cape Town to launch the highly accoladed *Property Magazine*.

During my early 30s, a career diversion followed as I consulted to SMMEs on growing their businesses online, which sealed my passion for developing brands in the digital space. I was the founding CEO and produced the [Bookmark Awards](#) for IAB SA before my current role as CEO of the PRC; returning to the publishers I have long served throughout my career, as they navigate their way around audiences shifting online and grapple with how to monetise this migration.

■ ***Tell us more about your vision for collaborative media research.***

To quote the esteemed Britta Reid, “Media buyers and sellers need an agreed currency with which to trade: The [South African] industry needs to work towards one solution that meets the needs of both the marketing and media fraternities, to facilitate informed investment decision-making.”

To that end, I firmly agree with Reid, it’s time to move from media defined by type (print, TV, radio, online) to media consumption (reading, viewing, listening and browsing) and for our sector to come together and unanimously agree to a future-ready solution to avoid a dark future for the audience measurement.

Unlocking cross-media, audience-centric insights to enable optimum performance of each medium to fuel content and advertising decisions and deliver cost efficiencies, can only be done (to the best of our ability) if we, as an industry sector, come together and collaborate in the creation of a cross-media audience measurement solution.

■ ***What advice can you give women in media and marketing?***

During the recent PRC #WomenInJournalism campaign recognising the role of female journalists as custodians of truth in our democracy, I noticed a common thread in all their answers to a similar question; what would they tell their younger selves? It was overwhelmingly to find courage. This resonates with me, so I would say: Have courage. In your decisions, your actions and yourself.

■ ***Who are your female role models and how have they helped shape the person you are today?***

My mother and her best friend, my godmother Josephine. I admire how they teamed up to raise an unplanned baby while building a life in a new city in another country while qualifying as nurses.

Former *Huffington Post* editor-in-chief Ariana Huffington. From founding *Huffington Post* in 2005 to AOL’s acquisition in 2011, which became the first commercially run US digital media company to win a Pulitzer Prize.

I’m grateful to my first female role model in my career, who gave me my first senior executive position with what felt like an immense amount of responsibility. I had, what I now know to be, imposter syndrome. In hindsight, I think she knew very well that the shoes she’d offered me were big to fill (and in a sense, perhaps took a gamble on me), but she also believed in me (before I fully believed in myself) and was an inspiring example of the kind of boss (lady) I wanted to be. She was a mentor before I knew I wanted to be one.

■ ***What has been your biggest triumph and perhaps, regret?***

Producing and hosting the IAB’s Digital Summit and Bookmark Awards 2015-18, to serve the industry that has given me my career, was one of my greatest privileges and gave me a sense of triumph. I don’t have any regrets concerning my career, every door that opened or closed was part of the journey to where I am today.

■ ***Is there something you think people would be surprised to learn about you?***

I'm told I'm pretty good at accents...

■ ***You have a passion for reading and the written word. Why is it so important to you?***

Access to knowledge, education, jobs, careers and the digital economy starts with reading and writing. It's essential for our continent's burgeoning youth, to ensure every child can read for meaning.

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