

Industry heavyweights launch Wonder, SA's newest CX agency



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Industry heavyweights Gareth McPherson (ex-Virgin Active chief marketing officer and both managing director and chief creative officer at Publicis Machine for close to eight years) and Helen Ludwig (local ad industry strategy leader and former managing director at Saatchi & Saatchi) have joined forces as CEO and chief strategy officer respectively at Wonder, the country's newest CX-specific agency. Digital maverick, Adrian Hewlett is a partner and non-executive chairperson.



Gareth McPherson, Helen Ludwig and Adrian Hewlett

Gareth McPherson, CEO of Wonder, shares more about Wonder...

■ **Congrats on the launch of Wonder. Tell us more about the consultancy?**

We're a customer experience company that focuses on the primacy of data, content and technology in building connected customer experiences.

“ We tap into super-senior cross-functional expertise to develop innovative solutions across the full customer journey from marketing through to sales and CRM. ”

We have a strong focus on pragmatic creativity that delivers real return to our clients.

■ **When and how did the idea come about?**

2020 presented a massive disruption to many businesses' customer experience. There was a dramatic shift not only in what was practically possible but also in customer expectations of how they wanted businesses to engage.

CX is a top C-Suite business priority in 2021 and we believe it will be so for some time. So we decided to build on our existing experience in this business-critical space and come together to form an offering that focuses specifically on this crucial component of business success.

■ **What is the core function of Wonder?**

Our core function is to connect businesses more effectively to their customers. We use data-driven insights to develop

strategies that are firmly grounded in the customer journey so that our clients can deliver the right intervention at the right time in the right place.

■ ***What are some of the services Wonder will be offering?***

CX strategy and design; brand development; data and tech solutions; UX design; content marketing; PR and influencer; experiential and activation; through-the-line communication.

■ ***What has the biggest challenge been with starting a business in a time of Covid-19?***

We are acutely aware of the financial loss, private struggles and personal tragedies faced by so many.

“ In the face of all the challenges, we have intentionally chosen to focus on identifying some opportunities presented by the shifting customer and business landscape. ”

New ways of working, future-focused innovation, the potential of digital technology to foster human connection...these are some of the themes that we have woven into our business model and our approach.



■ ***You and Helen Ludwig are both well-admired players in the marketing landscape. What sort of experience will each of you be bringing to Wonder?***

We both have had extensive careers that have seen them working across all aspects of connecting businesses to their customers, from brand communication, sales, marketing, digital services through to CRM software solutions.

As a creative by trade, I'm a rare blend of a creative thinker, strategist and business executive. A pioneer in the brand communications space, I previously led a multi-awarded agency, Machine, that was ranked one of the top advertising agencies in South Africa and later acquired by the Publicis Groupe.



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Most recently, I was CMO of one of the world's largest and most loved fitness brands, Virgin Active. Over my 20-year career, I've worked on multiple blue chip clients across the globe and through my extensive experience I've developed a strong understanding of how to connect businesses with their customers in meaningful ways.

Helen is a highly regarded business-building strategist and leader with a very broad skill set. She's had an illustrious career in top agencies working with blue chip clients across multiple categories connecting businesses to their customers across SA, Africa and the Middle East. She's successfully driven strategy for clients of all sizes from startups to multimillion rand corporates covering the full spectrum of B2B and B2C activity. She was head of strategy at The Jupiter Drawing Room Cape Town as well as chief strategy officer of Saatchi & Saatchi.

She has also run both independent and big network agencies, including being managing director of Saatchi & Saatchi SA. Helen delivers a sought-after blend of analytical prowess and creativity, packaged in practical, actionable strategy that helps businesses grow. She has developed a deep understanding of business and human behaviour through her close on two decades of experience complemented by an ongoing appetite for cross-disciplinary studies.

■ ***What excites you most about launching Wonder?***

We're excited about the chance to build something amazing. We are strong advocates of the power of purpose-driven business and we're excited to do meaningful work that has a genuine impact on our clients.

■ ***Could we see any new fresh approaches to customer experience? Our approach is purpose-driven, cross-functional, and dedicated to outcomes. We hold purpose at the heart of customer experience because it forms the emotional connection that a more rational sales funnel can then operationalise. Being purpose-driven is also widely acknowledged as leading to better business outcomes.***

We're cross-functional because we believe that's the best way to deliver innovative ideas. So we build bespoke teams based on project requirements rather than relying on the same set of talent to solve very different sorts of challenges. And we're extremely pragmatic, preferring to focus on workable solutions than blue-sky idealised thinking. Our mantra is 'be useful or be gone'. If we're not delivering results, what's the point?

■ ***What can organisations no longer ignore when it comes to their CX strategy?***

First, that it's a business critical area not a nice-to-have. Second, that engaged, inspired staff play a fundamental role in delivering a seamless CX (something purpose can really help to ignite). And third, that if the customer experience is not coherent, connected and concise it's unlikely to deliver against customer expectations.

■ ***How important is it for brands to tell stories that resonate with consumers?***

To wear a traditional marketing and communication hat for a moment, yes compelling, relevant storytelling drives deeper engagement and more willingness to consider and transact. But it's important to remember that you are always telling a story.

“ Whether you're doing it intentionally or not, each interaction the customer has with you leaves an impression, carries a specific tone, and adds to the picture that they're registering and reinforcing in their minds about what your brand is all about. ”

So even if you aren't communicating in the traditional sense, it's important that you know what story you're trying to land about your brand so that you can design your customer experience to be consistent with what your brand is promising to deliver.

■ What sort of CX trends can we see in 2021?

- **Technology-driven innovation:** specifically focused on service transformation.
- **Experimentation with different avenues for fulfilment:** different businesses testing and betting on different approaches to customer delivery.
- **A focus on the blended journey:** planning for the dynamic interplay of online and offline rather than viewing them through separate lenses.
- **Greater integration:** more examples of e-commerce baskets holding goods across portfolio brands, and greater integration with third party platforms.
- **More 'primary data' relationships:** businesses building more direct relationships with their customers given the increasing clampdown on the availability of third party data.
- **The rise of the 'experience intermediary':** third party businesses who can plug into and deliver fulfilment so that businesses are freer to focus on other primary aspects of their operation.

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