

Kim Thipe named one of the world's 15 top women in marketing

SAA's head of marketing and a UCT Graduate School of Business alumna, Kim Thipe, has been named one of the world's 15 top women in marketing by the Direct Marketing News 2016 Marketing Hall of Femme. The annual award honours the senior-most female marketers in organisations of all sizes and across all industries in the past year.



Kim Thipe

The core of the accomplished women of the Marketing Hall of Femme honored this year are recognised for their achievements in digital and direct marketing. The award is US based (where SAA has significant presence) with the majority of the nominees directing global portfolios and influence brand presence outside of the US.

Brands are embarking on unprecedented journeys with their customers; finding out who they are and what they need remains a key driver for marketers all over the planet. “Everyone is in that space and that is exciting,” says Thipe.

Thipe started her career in advertising before switching track to work at executive level on big brands such as FNB, M-Net and YFM. However, it is her work at South African Airways (SAA) that attracted the attention of the DMS team.

DMS calls her “one of the most prodigious movers of people” and describes her as being responsible for a multi-channelled marketing strategy of SAA that saw passenger insights contribute to determining messaging and tactics to drive both revenue and brand performance. SAA also retained its Skytrax ranking as Africa’s best airline and was named the top domestic airline by the TNS Sunday Times Top Brands survey amongst many awards.

To Thiye it is all about teamwork and says, if anything, her leadership style is collaborative. She values a cross-pollination of different ideas and perspectives and says putting big ideas into writing helps colleagues to better define action strategies. “I believe in being a visible leader and that means not only physically being there, but people feeling they can approach you and discuss anything about the discipline.”

While being great at marketing helps in the industry, Thiye believes to excel, marketers need a solid understanding of business as well. “It is crucial to have solid business knowledge of the industry you serve, to exert the most influence and innovation through marketing.”

She credits the two years she spent at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) completing her Executive MBA in 2007 as one of the most career-defining moments of her life. “The GSB EMBA programme was a great one for me, vastly improving my ability to solve and implement complex management problems, using the baseline tools of the programme.”

It helped her see how applying systems thinking could be implemented to the marketing and media environment at SAA; a global communications system anchored within a local framework requiring interpretations of our messaging to customers with various feedback loops, interconnections and commonalities. “When managed correctly, this approach offers cost savings and channel synergies.”

“This year, our team is going to focus more on content distribution and the integration of customer-touch-point platforms to constantly improve our channel mix using some of the same models. This has helped us manage the diversity of messaging.”

No tools in the world, however, can substitute for personal experience and character – especially when the going gets tough. The nature of marketing is that something is always happening, with problems popping up unexpectedly. “My motto is really to remain calm. This can be difficult, considering that I work in the airline industry, on a global brand in a very competitive and dynamic environment,” she concludes.

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