

#BehindtheSelfie with... Debi O'Brien

This week, we find out what's really going on behind the selfie with Debi O'Brien, MD of iKineo customer engagement agency.



O'Brien's dancing deep in that purple haze.

1. Where do you live, work and play?

O'Brien: I live in Lonehill and work in Dunkeld and in clients' offices. I play in the bush and at the beach.

2. What's your claim to fame?

O'Brien: I think I've become synonymous with the direct industry, having been in it for over 20 years now. Plus, I pride myself on having a solid, reliable network; relationships are important to me.

3. Describe your career so far.

O'Brien: It has been exciting, dynamic and evolving. I've found that my passion lies in building people to deliver great CRM and DM results to brands, customer engagement creative strategic and results-driven campaigns – no, really – numbers make me tick and I love to resolve strategic issues.

4. Tell us a few of your favourite things.

O'Brien: My daughters, my husband, friends, painting, *Game of Thrones*, wine, photography, the bush and wildlife.

5. What do you love about your industry?

O'Brien: It's dynamic, ever-evolving and never boring. It's second nature to me now.

6. What are a few pain points your industry can improve on?

O'Brien:

1. The pitch process
2. Clients that just want super-fast delivery, no matter what (at risk of insights and strategy falling by the wayside)
3. Clients that treat us as suppliers, rather than partners

7. Describe your average workday, if such a thing exists.

O'Brien: My day starts at 8am and ends around 6pm or 7pm. It's pretty much a mixed bag every day...

It usually starts with a 'Priorities Planning Exco Call' each morning, followed by an 'Account Management Priorities Call', and then I get into the day. A normal day includes tons of meetings; an insane amount of emails; some strategy work; ongoing staff engagement (I love my team, they're all amazing); HR; PR; and finances.

8. What are the tools of your trade?

O'Brien: I believe you need brains, self-motivation, a strategic mindset and passion. And, having the traits of a psychologist is incredibly valuable – knowing your customers and what makes them tick will help you get it right.

9. Who is getting it right in your industry?

O'Brien: This business is results-driven, so it's clear who the achievers are. The top-ranked agencies continue to grow in terms of new account gains.

10. What are you working on right now?

O'Brien: We have some amazing Telkom Business projects – dynamic and bringing digitalised CRM to life. There are also some exciting Jeep and Fiat CRM strategies in the pipeline. And, tackling new business, of course – always!

11. Tell us some of the buzzwords floating around in your industry at the moment, and some of the catchphrases you utter yourself.

O'Brien: eCRM, VR, digital, big data and ROI.

12. Are you a technophobe or a technophile?

O'Brien: I'm an in-between. I'm super interested in all the new stuff, but it takes time to learn about it. My kids do help keep me on trend.

13. Where and when do you have your best ideas?

O'Brien: From conversations with people. And at AfrikaBurn; the heart of creativity from a diverse group of interests!

14. What's your secret talent/party trick?

O'Brien: I love to dance – I'm really a hippie at heart.

15. What would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

O'Brien: My phone is super busy and reflects my state of mind!

You'll find family 'group chats', tons of messages and calls between me and my hubbie – my family is my reason for being; Snapchats, Facebook – love them both. Tons of pics; my phone is my reminder of fun times. And emails.

16. What advice would you give to newbies hoping to crack into the industry?

O'Brien: Bring in passion, build boundaries and strive to prioritise every day; you'll never get it all done. Deliver a superb and fulfilling experience. Be curious and work to know more about your clients' marketplace than they do; find the time, even though it's not always easy!

Simple as that. [Click here for more on iKineo](#) and follow O'Brien on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

**Interviewed by [Leigh Andrews](#).*

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at [@Leigh_Andrews](#).

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