

Nontuthuko Mhlungu, brand manager at SHA Risk Specialists, a division of Santam

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Nontuthuko Mhlungu shares her journey that led to her being the brand manager at SHA Risk Specialists...



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■ Tell us more about your role and what it entails exactly

To give some context to my role as a brand manager at SHA, it's important to understand our business model, and what it is we do. SHA Risk Specialists is a division of Santam Ltd, providing specialised insurance products. We have various niche products, ranging from General Liability, Professional Indemnity, Directors and officers Liability, cybercrime insurance, Accident and health, which are available to SMEs and big corporates alike.

I often like to think of what we do, as giving peace of mind to our clients; for them to know that our 37 years in the industry means they can be confident in our expertise, and that our longevity means we will stand by them when they are hit with a big claim – which often takes years to finalise and settle in court. So no, insurance is not a grudge purchase, but an enabler, and in some cases, the difference between continuing with your business, or making the tough call to close your doors in the aftermath of a big claim.

My role, therefore, entails creating and raising awareness of what it is we do, as well as positioning SHA Risk Specialists as thought leaders and experts in our field.

■ Growing up, what did you want to be?

I've always thought of myself as a creative, and so growing up, I had aspirations of becoming an advertising executive at a

top advertising agency.

■ Tell us about your career: what you studied and why, and how you ended up where you are today?

My career journey has been interesting, to say the least. As a child, I had always wanted to go into advertising, so no one was more surprised than me, when I made the sudden change to law – because lawyers earn more money and it's just more prestigious than advertising – or so I thought.

After completing my law degree and becoming admitted as an Attorney of the High Court, I felt a sense of accomplishment, even though I knew deep down that this was not the career path for me. I would later land a role at SHA Risk Specialist as a Claims specialist, where my law degree served me. I worked at SHA for a year, before leaving to pursue a full-time career as a motivational speaker. That year had to have been one of the scariest, but also the most fulfilling. It was during this year that I learned of my entrepreneurial spirit and the power of harnessing my personal brand.

While I loved my journey of being an entrepreneur, I soon realised that I was not ready to step out on my own, this prompted me to return to corporate. Because I had left on good terms, SHA Risk specialists re-employed me, only this time, as a PR and media specialist, which at the time was a new department. I have been in a PR, Brand and marketing role since 2017, and have never looked back.

■ What other sectors impact on your industry?

SHA is a specialist insurance provider, with our products offering spanning various industry sectors. Some of the sectors we enable and provide a service to, include construction, mining, agriculture and food processing, wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, finance real estate and business services, to name but a few.

■ What are some of your most recent brand campaigns and the rationales behind them?

One of our most recent campaigns involves creating and raising awareness about our purpose statement– the reason why we exist. In the business of today's world, it's easy to get bogged down with the day-to-day tasks, forgetting the 'why' of it all.

Our purpose statement captures our 'why' quite succinctly – enabling progress, securing tomorrow and this is precisely what we do. We enable businesses, big and small, to take risks, and give the insured peace of mind that they have a team of insurance experts who are ready to stand by them, in their greatest time of need.

■ In your opinion, what do you think are the most successful channels for getting your brand message out there?

With the digital age we find ourselves in, it's important to leverage the various online and social media platforms and to take our content to the platforms where our clients are spending their time. This does require a clear understanding and knowledge of your client profile, so as to avoid a 'one-size fits all' approach.

While we incorporate the different marketing channels into our marketing strategy, we have been deliberate and placed specific focus on our website, as well as made use of online platforms like MS teams to engage with and train our brokers. We know we have been successful in communicating our brand message when our clients become our biggest ambassadors and advocate for us.

■ Any career highlights you'd like to share.

There are quite a few, but the most notable of these, was when I co-lead the rebranding of SHA back in 2019. The rebrand of SHA would culminate not only in the reveal of our new brand to our clients and stakeholders, but also the launch and presentation of our 2019 Annual Specialist Risk Review report, which has become a key differentiator for SHA and an integral part of our brand equity

■ When it comes to branding, what can brands no longer ignore?

I would say, brands can no longer ignore the customer's voice, which is the foundation upon which any brand and marketing strategy should be built. It's important to understand that without the customer, there are no marketing campaigns, and more importantly, there is no business.

■ If you were mentoring a future you, what career advice would you give to aspiring young marketing and branding professionals?

Well quite honestly, the path I am on now is not one that I pursued and sought out in my younger years – you could say that it 'found me'. Having said that, there are two distinct pieces of advice I would impart on a young brand and marketing aspirant.

The first being; pay close attention to the things you like and that you are good at, broadly speaking, and within the brand and marketing space. You may want to want to enter the brand and marketing arena but may not know which industry type you would like to practice as a brand and marketing specialist.

While there may be some parallels, the approach to brand and marketing in the FMCG industry is different to that of the financial services industry. Exposure to brand and marketing in the various industries is therefore important

The second piece of advice would be; Relax, it's going to be ok. By all means, continue to set goals and work towards them, but rest in the comfort that it will all work out. It's ok not to have everything figured out in your early twenties.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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