

# Elevator appoints all-female leadership team

 By Jessica Tennant

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With the imminent departure of one of the agency founders Mike Silver, specialist brand experience agency Elevator has appointed an all-female leadership team headed up by Catherine Mavrocoleas and Katherine Freemantle.



Catherine Mavrocoleas and Katherine Freemantle, joint managing partners of Elevator.

The agency has been working on the transition for the past six months when Silver first announced his intention to relocate to the US. The decision was made to replace him with leaders from within the agency that has been an integral part of the leadership DNA over the last few years. Mavrocoleas was previously MD and Freemantle client service director. They will both now move into joint managing partner roles while Silver will retain his Board seat.

The Smollan group acquired a majority stake in the agency, towards the end of 2018, to boost their local below the line strategic and creative capabilities.

Commenting on his decision to hand over his role to Mavrocoleas and Freemantle, Silver said that while he did not expect to depart during a global pandemic, he believes they are more than capable of navigating these turbulent times. “Their complementary skillset will help take Elevator into a new phase of maturation alongside our Smollan partners. I’d like to thank all of our clients, partners and most importantly people that have enabled the agency to truly disrupt SA’s brand experience landscape over the past 11 years.”



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“While these are difficult times, I’m really looking forward to being a part of this next iteration of the agency,” said Mavrocoleas. “On a personal note, alongside Kath, I’m proud to be a part of one of the only all-female agency leadership teams in the country”.

Freemantle wishes Mike and his family all the best with the move abroad and that said they look forward to enhancing their capabilities to deliver more creative work that works for their clients, which currently include Astron Energy, Lipton Ice Tea, PMI, Edward Snell and Metropolitan.

We asked Mavrocoleas and Freemantle to tell us more about what it took to get to this position of leadership, as women in business, and the timing of this, given the national lockdown and global economic crisis...

■ ***What does this appointment mean to you?***

**Freemantle:** In a few words: opportunity, excitement, a new adventure, a new challenge, a new chapter for Elevator.

**Mavrocoleas:** I have learnt so much in the past eight years at Elevator, thanks to many talented people I have worked alongside. Becoming a managing partner of an already successful company is a great achievement and one which I have worked very hard to get to. I am really looking forward to putting my stamp on the business together with Kath.

■ ***What does your new role entail?***

**Freemantle:** Mike said recently to a client on announcing his departure and myself and Cath's dual leadership, "They've been telling me what to do since the day they arrived at the agency," so in some ways, I will say that I have been doing this job for a little while now. But in all seriousness, the new role will naturally entail a more holistic responsibility and ownership across all facets of the business for both Cath and myself, with me leaning more into the client and strategic side and Cath the more operations and financial side. And also, given the timing, a reinvention of the agency, which I am especially and greatly excited by.

■ ***Although Mike will remain on the Board, how do you feel about being on an all-female agency leadership team?***

**Mavrocoleas:** I am excited to lead the charge in being a female leadership team, which isn't seen that often in adland. We hope that we can inspire and show that women can and should make it to the top. All businesses can benefit from more female leadership.

■ ***What is your opinion on the glass ceiling/glass cliff? What barriers or opportunities have you faced as a woman in business and do you feel that any of these are unique to the fact that you're a woman?***

**Freemantle:**

“ As a woman, I do believe there does still exist an element of fight to get to high-level positions, a level of vocal chord strain to be heard and a sense of needing to 'prove' in a different way in order to validate success. ”

Recently, however, I have observed more powerful women growing within this industry and a rise in the number of female-led teams and businesses around me grow and prosper. It excites me to watch them reimagine the rules and the approach,

change the conversation and make space without apology.

**Mavrocoleas:** I have worked my way up in this company while also growing my family (I have two strong-willed little girls aged three and five). It has been very hard at times to juggle both mom and work.

“ Current society is not fully equipped for full-time working moms in leadership positions, so it has been a struggle to not let one part of my life suffer. This takes constant reminding that working moms have two jobs and we can't be penalised for it. Covid-19 has made society take a closer look at what it actually means, and how we can work around working-mom schedules with more compassion and out-of-the-box thinking. ”



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#### ■ And the timing, given the national lockdown and global economic crisis.

**Freemantle:** The timing of the appointment was always set for now. Ironically, it happened mid-lockdown and mid-pandemic. Given the circumstance, it has the feeling of starting something afresh. As with a lot of our peers, we are re-strategising what and how and we are choosing to take the view that this is an opportunity to rethink and rebuild something strong and long-lasting.

#### ■ Comment on how Elevator and/or the industry has been affected/impacted.

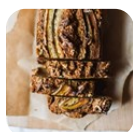
**Mavrocoleas:** Our industry has been dramatically affected by Covid-19. Marketing budgets have been slashed and events have been put on hold or moved out to 2021. We have felt the impact, but we have worked fast to relook certain aspects and also pinpoint opportunities. Our team has been amazing and dedicated and has taken working from home in their stride, which meant we can continue to deliver great work (quickly) to our clients during this time.

#### ■ And how you've responded, your growth strategy(ies), etc.

**Freemantle:** During the first few weeks of lockdown, our primary focus was on our people. We have in the past few weeks started to shift our mindset out of survival mode and look forward. We have begun to re-strategise in some areas, upskill where needed and soak up as much information as possible around consumer behaviour and how our world is changing. We have also adjusted in how we work (from home), how we communicate and our rate of response. I have been so proud of how our Elevator team has adapted, come to the party and worked through all of this. A bunch of amazing humans who we are beyond lucky to have on our team.

#### ■ What are you most afraid of / looking forward to?

**Mavrocoleas:** It's scary to not know the full impact of Covid-19 on the future business. I like to plan and lead with facts but that's not a luxury we currently have. However, it has meant we have had to be honest and vulnerable with our people and partners, which has led to great support from all. I am really looking forward to carving out a new destiny, with new leadership, within the new normal.



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**Freemantle:** On a personal note, I am looking forward to watching and learning how consumer behaviour will unfold in the coming months and longer term. There have been so many studies, forecasts and webinars that have projected what this will look like, all with conflicting views and I am fascinated to watch the reality unfold. More broadly, I look forward to building something great and exciting, alongside Cath. Something we can both be proud of, and try to also remember to have a little fun while we do it.

## ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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