

Itu Senne shares how Covid-19 has impacted the world of sports marketing



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

8 Feb 2021

Itu Senne, the newly appointed head of marketing at SuperSport, shares the importance of sport in South Africa, the shift in digital marketing and how Covid-19 has impacted the world of sports marketing...



Itu Senne, newly appointed head of marketing at SuperSport.

Itu Senne joined SuperSport United in 2002 as a marketing intern. She was then recruited into the SuperSport International in 2003 on the back of the launch of SuperSport's AmaTuesday coverage of the PSL. With the business decision to put more effort into the Africa business, in 2010 she was promoted to Brand Manager: Africa, where she developed and executed on brand strategies for SuperSport on the continent.

The expansion of SuperSport into the continent came with the acquisition of football leagues in Nigeria, Ghana, Angola, Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe. By 2015, as the marketing and communications manager, her duties included creating strategies that would help drive awareness and uptake of the leagues, PR and publicity and developing and maintaining favourable relationships with the media, key sporting bodies and football stakeholders in each of the markets. The role came with the responsibility of looking after a team of marketing managers located in Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia and Angola and aligning ways of working between SuperSport and the in-country DStv teams.

In 2018, she was promoted to senior manager of marketing and tasked with developing and executing a marketing strategy that optimises the balance between the promotion of SuperSport's broadcast properties and the SuperSport brand, whilst also ensuring collaboration and alignment with group objectives.

In December 2020, Senne was appointed head of marketing at SuperSport.

■ **As the head of marketing at SuperSport, what has your experience been like so far?**

That old expression “hitting the ground running” really sums it up.

“ Taking up this role in the middle of a global pandemic has challenged me and the business to find innovative and creative opportunities to keep sports lovers entertained and engaged during a time when their viewing experience has changed dramatically. ”

Remotely leading a team through this process has been a challenge I am quite enjoying.

■ **You've been with SuperSport for nearly 20 years. What are some of the highlights of your career?**

There have been many, but three stands out: SuperSport's deal with the PSL in 2007 which heralded a new era in the broadcast and delivery of much loved Premier Soccer League offering; the 2010 FIFA World Cup – a once in a lifetime experience for a continent like Africa; and perhaps the most fulfilling and eye-opening was the opportunity to work on the continent for 10 years covering markets such as Nigeria, Ghana, Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

■ **What excites you most about your industry?**

Sports broadcasting has always been about allowing passionate fans to feel like they are part of the action, to give them a seat in the stadium.

“ With the Covid-19 situation it is more important than ever to use all the tools at our disposal to deliver this experience to our viewers. ”

The way fans consume sports content is changing rapidly. Our website, app and social media platforms allow us to directly connect with our audience during the best and worst moments. Through these digital platforms, we're able to keep telling the story long after the final whistle has gone or the trophy has been won.



Re-engaging and reimagining the SA sponsorship industry

Judith Mugeni 14 Jan 2021



■ **What is it like working in a male dominated industry?**

It's undoubtedly changed in the past 20 years. Women are slowly getting acceptance. I think of someone like Moira Thagale, Pitso Mosimane's agent. She ventured into Egypt, a largely patriarchal society, and negotiated a major deal with Al Ahly. That she did so as an equal, not giving an inch, only served to underline her credentials.

“ It is also encouraging to see the growth in the number of sport personalities, who happen to be female, on television and radio covering some of the biggest events. ”

A number of my colleagues come to mind such as Carol Tshabalala who has long being in the game to a crop of rising stars such as Motshidisi Mohono and Lindiwe Dube. Something like this points to fundamental change in the industry, even if change doesn't always come as fast as it should.

■ **In your view, what's the importance of sport in South Africa?**

It's the biggest unifier, isn't it? I think of the African Cup of Nations, which Bafana Bafans won 25 years ago this week, and how people came together to celebrate.

“ We've seen it with rugby too, the wave of euphoria that followed the World Cup win is testament to the role sport plays in elevating the mood of the nation and gives us a sense of hope. ”

Sport allows people a form of escape and it's a powerful reminder of the great people among us. The stories, the characters, the triumphs and the tears sweep us all along, and we're pleased for it. It's our privilege at SuperSport to share these stories.

■ ***The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted sports across the world. Could you share some insights on your viewership throughout the pandemic? Most people are at home, so viewing habits have changed, to the extent that you often get kids, parents and at times grandparents all sitting down to watch at the same time. With almost all live sport suspended, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, we looked to our archives and saw this as an opportunity to give the fans a chance to relive some of the greatest moments in sport. We re-purposed content and acquired some of the best documentaries available, many of them from partners like ESPN.***

The response from our viewers was heartening as they enjoyed a chance to revisit great performances and memorable achievements. When the grind of lockdown started to set in, we partnered with fitness brands and scheduled exercise shows which gave viewers an opportunity to keep active. There's no substitute for live sport so the return of live international football last June followed soon after by the PSL was well-received. It showed just how much fans had missed it.

■ ***Digital marketing is becoming increasingly important for operations. What advice do you have for other organisations?***

Understanding your audience is key. The beauty of digital is that it allows you to measure and track performance at every moment in the journey.

“ Whether you're selling entertainment or a tangible product, identifying what your customers like and how they interact with you online is key. ”

It's one of the reasons why personalisation was at the core of our new SuperSport App. We've given the power to the user, allowing them to personalize the content they see in their app to their favourites teams and tournaments.

In addition, creating a conversation with followers and the public is more important than pushing content at them. The hilarious “interviews” that local talent [@kookie_kuhle](#) has posted and [@ESPNAfrica](#)'s clever campaign to drive awareness of American Sport featuring [@tysonngubeni](#) are brilliant examples of creating content around sport in a funny and engaging manner.



ESPN Africa collaborates with comedy character Bob O'Connor

25 Jan 2021



“





[View this post on Instagram](#)



A post shared by Kooks (@kookie_kuhle)

”

■ ***When it comes to sports marketing specifically, what approach do you take?***

Sport is driven mostly by the live product which then creates opportunities for conversation and engagement. You have to have watched the game to be able to participate in water cooler chats or to even be part of the banter on social media platforms. This is the language of sport whether you are in Port Elizabeth, Nairobi, Kenya or Abuja, Nigeria.

“ Our approach is to be current and topical and always aim to recreate the emotional feeling one would've felt had you been present at the venue the event was held at. ”

I would like to get to a point where collaboration between sport brands, talent, rights holders etc. becomes the norm as the opportunities that lie therein are limitless.

■ ***Innovation and creativity is key, especially in the time of Covid-19. What can organisations no longer ignore when it comes to strategy?***

Organisations can no longer dictate to customers about what to watch. We must be customer-centric and tap into their needs.

“ There's a great need to be agile and responsive in an industry that is fluid and fast. Old thinking has no place. The world has changed, and we have to be innovative. This is key to any strategy. ”

■ ***In terms of the sports industry, what could we expect to see in 2021?***

2021 is a year of big sporting events with the UEFA Euro 2020 and the Tokyo 2020 Olympics on the horizon. We've already seen an openness from right owners and sponsors to partner on content and engagement opportunities. We expect this to become the norm post Covid-19.

“ Digital platforms have allowed us to break down the “walls” that existed between athletes and fans, allowing audiences to feel closer to the stars that they’ve ever been. With everyone more connected, we expect fans to be more immersed in the experience regardless of whether they’re in the stadium or not. ”

An example that comes to mind is Verzuz – the webcast series - partnering with the NFL for “The NFL Pro Bowl Verzuz”. This is where NFL stars go head to head for 10 rounds showcasing their best on and off-field highlights from the 2020 season and fans get to judge who had the better play, a simple and easy way to bring fans closer to the stars and helps unlock markets on a much larger scale, while keeping safety first and costs low.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

Group Editor: Retail and Lifestyle

- #AfricaMonth: A look at music publishing in SA with Eddie Hatitye of Music In Africa Foundation - 24 May 2022
- #Newsmaker: Karena Crerar, new Edelman Africa CEO - 24 May 2022
- Wonder celebrates a year of leading purpose-based brands - 24 May 2022
- kykNET's *Kassie-Kuiers* reaches 500,000 views in six months - 18 May 2022
- Castle Lager to embrace township economy in new brand positioning - 17 May 2022

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>