

Nontobeko Sibiya, Nando's marketing manager in communications

 By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

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Nontobeko Sibiya shares her rich experience in communications and how she ended up at Nando's as a marketing manager in communications.



Nontobeko Sibiya. Source: Supplied.

■ ***Tell us about your role at Nando's***

I started working at Nando's in 2019, as a regional marketing manager for our central region, which predominantly covers Gauteng and Mpumalanga. I moved into the brand strategy and communications team as marketing manager: communications in 2021. In this role, I am responsible for the advertising, media and PR of our South African business. I also handle brand sponsorships and get involved in a wild list of other activities wherever I can.

■ ***Tell us about your career and where you studied***

I started my undergraduate journey at Wits studying for a Bachelor of Commerce. At the end of my first year I had to have an honest conversation with myself. After going through all 'six stages of grief', and bargaining heavily with my folks, I realised that while I possibly could do the numbers if I really wanted to, I didn't enjoy it. I'm a creative, through and through. So, the following year I applied at UJ for a Bachelor of Arts in marketing communications.

Once I'd graduated I was offered an internship at Native (now, VMLY&R). It was during my time at Native that I was first acquainted with the Nando's brand, beyond being a fan and avid consumer. After a few years of flexing my digital advertising prowess, I moved to M&C Saatchi Abel to build experience in ATL advertising.

In 2019, I stopped blue-ticking this chicken brand that seemed to be following me around for years, and I decided to answer my PERi-calling. Now I spend my days breaking formulas on excel spreadsheets, while selling chicken.

■ ***What have been the highlights of your career?***

I've been so fortunate to have been trusted with several iconic brands throughout the years. I have a highlight for each year of my career but there are a few that stick out:

B.C (Before Chickenland):

- The #PortraitInProgress campaign which was developed to launch Standard Bank South Africa on Instagram, culminating in the first Insta-bition at the SB Gallery.
- The Best Shisanyama Search by Windhoek which was an acknowledgement of local businesses that offer great experiences in our kasi's.
- Launching Choma an initiative by HIVSA, created for young women to equip them with tools and resources that will assist them in decisions relating to their sexual health.

Since joining Nando's:

- The KZN Art Project in partnership with Spier Arts Trust and artist Nkoali Nawa who used a charcoal medium to symbolise that beauty can rise from ashes, to celebrate the reopening of some of our KZN stores after the July 2021 unrest.
- Introducing our new music showcase "Basha In Casa, aimed at giving a stage to emerging musical talent alongside established artists, while entertaining our dine-in guests.
- No less than 5 pieces of great advertising work over the last 8 months, culminating in our latest piece, "Quantum Leap", that launched in early November. I'm incredibly proud of this piece of work and thrilled that it is being received with the same love and enthusiasm that went into making it.

📌 ***What are the biggest challenges facing the communications industry right now?***

In advertising specifically, I think that there's a 'sea of sameness' that seems to breed in environments where being safe is favoured in fear of being cancelled. I've seen many creative ideas die (or be so overly-sanitised that they may as well be dead) before they are even given a chance. Brands shouldn't be intentionally divisive or provocative, but in equal measures, they shouldn't stifle their boldness or point of view in an attempt to be accepted by absolutely everyone. Great work makes people talk. Boring work goes by unnoticed. There's far too much apathy in people's lives to risk being average.

In the media landscape we're also facing a very fragmented audience, who is split across multiple channels in a very cluttered and fast paced environment. This makes cutting through more difficult, making it even more important to be deliberate in crafting messages that stand out, connect with people, fit your brand tone and personality, and can offer a positive perspective to make a meaningful impact. Effectiveness still matters. And if it can have entertainment value- even better!

The irony that the major Cannes outtake this year is centred around creativity, is not lost on me. What's most surprising is that it's taken the industry this long to realise it. Long live the days where we celebrate our creativity – in all its forms – and leave less time to get distracted by tech and metaverses and the innumerate channels and mediums we now have at our disposal to spread great ideas. An average idea will always be an average idea, no matter how it lives in the world. A great idea will find its way.

■ What are some of the memorable Nando's campaigns you have worked on?

My proudest and our most recent brand advert, Quantum Leap, showcases the ingenuity of South Africans and serves as a reminder to recognise our power once again. We are faced with unimaginable adversity every day, and there is a growing sense of understandable discontent. Instead of letting apathy win, we remind the people of South Africa that we are never powerless. The ad is an apt and subtle build from our "Bright Sides" campaign, which gave people something to look forward to with each stage of load shedding.

I'm also reminded of our Boujee Bowl campaign from 2019 where we had tongues wagging on who owns the term "Boujee", after a local personality asked us to credit him for the word. I was probably six weeks in and still in my probation period at Nando's when we executed this tactical and I was convinced that I'd be chucked out of the coop. Thankfully I wasn't, and this was a fun tactical that resulted in a significant amount of PR coverage, lots of sales, and activations in our restaurants which our guests enjoyed.

■ Any advice for people who want to enter the industry?

Be vocal. It may seem obvious for someone who wants to be in communications but it's not. It may be tempting to nod in agreement in boardrooms, while your gut is telling you that something is off. As a huge fan of Shonda Rhimes, I have references from Grey's Anatomy for almost everything, so I'll use one to dock this point. In the episode where Derek Shepherd dies, Meredith drops bars on Penny Clark who was one of the surgeons that treated Derek when he arrived in the ER. Penny failed to speak up and to insist that Derek desperately needed a CT scan. Until it was too late. Meredith reveals to Penny that Derek was her "one". That his death would haunt her, and she would be reminded that he was the one that died on her watch. And that would make her work harder, so she can be better, or it would make her quit.

So speak up, even if your voice is shaking. Today, more so than ever before, different thoughts and perspectives matter. Find a place that celebrates yours. I have the privilege of working alongside some industry heavyweights. One such person is our CMO Doug Place who often encourages us "youngins" to remain inquisitive about the world and show interest in things like philosophy. By his recommendation I found myself reading *Crime and Punishment* by Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. It was a heavy read but it's amazing how a body of work from the 1800's bears so many similarities to concepts entrenched in modern day life. Communication has a wide-reaching influence and application – there isn't a book in the world that you can't apply in some way to what you do every day. Reading, purposefully and extensively, is never a bad idea.

Lastly- make friends, it's a small industry. The friends and colleagues today may land up being your client, your boss or your direct report. If not, they certainly know someone who will. Remember this point particularly when someone cuts in front of you and you want to respond with rage. You don't want to find yourself avoiding eye contact when you see this person at the networking session later. Awks...

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

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