

Influence: Driving the necessary conversations

By  Danette Breitenbach

24 Aug 2022

Lebo Madiba has been in the communications arena for the better part of two decades and is the founder and MD of PR Powerhouse. Recently she launched *Influence*, a podcast on issues shaping our world.



Image supplied. Lebo Madiba, whose curiosity led to the podcast *Influence*

What led her to this project is partly being in public relations (PR) and being exposed to the type of work that she does, but also her curiosity about what is happening around her.

“I looked at the work that we are doing in the reputation management space and engaged with some very intelligent people in that world and that inspired me to create the platform that feeds my curiosity.”

“As a curious mind, I have often felt that we do not have enough platforms that are engaging and informative, particularly on issues that deep dive into how the world is changing,” she says.

She adds that the world is in flux. “In the last five years alone, we have had the Trump presidency and the global pandemic, and more recently the Russia-Ukraine war. Many other shifts are creating uncertainty in the way we work, and in the world in general.”

Perspectives and clarity on a changing world

For her, the platform had to drive conversations that could create the idea and shift perceptions, with people of all types and from all walks of life, on different issues.

"It may not always have the answers at hand, but it's a very highly connected world and we have access to a network of intelligence and that's what *Influence* is - a platform and podcast to gain perspectives and clarity on a changing world," she explains.

She believes that we are not getting enough of that from traditional media. "I also feel that when we discuss issues on social media platforms, it is fleeting. You comment on someone else's post and then it is gone, and you don't go back to that space anymore."

The space she has created speaks to this. "*Influence* is a space where people who have an interest in the dynamics of a changing world, whether it is Environment, Social and Governance (ESG), digital transformation, geopolitics, or whatever issues are prevalent in our current environment. This is a space to converse and hear different perspectives from different people."



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"Traditional media was able to and still does, offer some level of credibility. You know that what you are consuming has been fact-checked. But social media does not give you that - an algorithm feeds you what you consume so you are what you consume," she says.

"As consumers, we don't get to discuss different perspectives from a wide variety of people that have knowledge in different spaces," she adds.

Influence addresses this. "I invite everyone from a senior level, such as Jay Naidoo to the lady in Soweto who is growing vegetables because she has realised that sustainability is about people taking action."

"It's a platform for a variety of perspectives so that people can shape their own opinions," she states.

Everyone has an opinion

The era of media where we thought that brands and us as agencies can shape narrative is fast fading, she says, because everyone now has an opinion. "The best we can do is look at how we can constructively start to shape those opinions."

It became apparent to her over the last two years in the work the agency had been doing, especially the work around Covid awareness and vaccines, that we must have a microscopic view of the audiences that we want to talk to.

"Audiences are so fragmented that communication needs to be so much more targeted. We have to go at different audiences at a time, not everyone at once," she says.

Madiba explains that when you go microscopic, you can tap into cultural nuances, social nuances and whatever else

influences that community, or that audience of people that you want to target.

“It is not the only way, but it is the best way to approach an issue if you need to contribute to any narrative. If you go wider, it just opens brands up to so much scrutiny and takes away some credibility,” she explains.



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An ESG focus

In the current season of the podcast, the focus is on ESG. “This is an emerging trend, with so many of my clients working on how they can position themselves within the ESG themes.”

The other reason she says they started with ESG is that we will see it coming through from a brand and communications perspective, especially as climate change and social issues climb up the agenda.

“ESG is key because it speaks to social issues around poverty, gender, and inequality which are top of mind everywhere, in addition to environmental and governance principles,” says Madiba.

The first guest on the subject and the podcast was Jay Naidoo. “I wanted to have the conversation with him because he has such in-depth experience of life in South Africa before freedom,” she says.

“He has learnt from his failures and successes, and he speaks of the failures of his generation very freely. But he is also a humanitarian. For me, all those experiences have gone into the conversation that we had with him. It sets the tone for what we want to explore and how wide and broad we want to go,” she explains.

The ESG theme will also cover reporting and regulation and other elements of ESG.

“This includes how brands need to implement ESG to ensure it’s not just wallpaper, but integral to their brand campaigns,” adds Madiba.

There are 12 episodes on ESG and then the podcast will move to its next theme. A new episode is released every Wednesday.



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Content creation: a lot of work

Madiba says a lot of work goes into bringing the podcast to life. “I did not think it would be so much work, but it is a lot of work. It’s a full-time job. I underestimated the world of content creation.”

Luckily, she has a team that she works with and together they read and intake reports and articles and engage in active social listening. “We bring this together at a content meeting to understand what the primary issues are that we need to address and then who the thought leaders are and what kind of views they bring to the table. We want diverse views,” she explains.

She adds that if they feel they don't have the right people, they go out and search more. "People need to have solid voices around the issues we want to discuss."

Once the right people are found, they reach out to them to be on the podcast. Then the recording takes place. From beginning to the final product is a two-week schedule.

An audience that wants to engage

"I realise that podcasts are not for everyone. But we wanted to make sure that we create a platform that people engage with because they want to. These are the type of people that will give themselves time to engage with the content because it fills some gaps in their schedules and their minds," she says.

"Our thinking is that we run with the podcast to grow a following of the right people that have an interest in the kind of content that we produce but the long-term goal is to start looking at these issues that we discuss and putting them into some sort insights and reports that we can share with the industry," she expands.

That for her is the goal. "But for now, it is about making sure that we have enough depth of content, topics and speakers that are engaging, and attract the audience we want to engage with."

Influence is available on the [website](#), [Spotify](#), [Podbean](#) and [Sound Cloud](#)

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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