

Newsmaker: Gareth McPherson to lead Virgin Active's new marketing strategy



By Jessica Tennant

21 Feb 2020

The Virgin Active group has been on a transformation journey, implementing global systems to enhance its customer experience. This was kickstarted by the appointment of Nikki Cockcroft as global chief marketing and technology officer, followed by Mark Field as MD of the South African business.

With the business and infrastructure turnaround well underway, the latest addition sees Gareth McPherson from Publicis Machine join the club as CMO.

“The Virgin brand embodies an entrepreneurial spirit and there is an intersect of my own personal values and mindset. The role is a departure from agency, but it is one that embraces digital and data on every level to put the member first, deliver solutions and move the business to a position of increased relevance in an online world. It is a role that offers opportunity with the right amount of challenge.”

McPherson will lead a team organised around the delivery of an enhanced customer proposition and experience, as well as increased relevance in a market where online coaching and fitness apps are prolific. He will play a key role in realising the new strategy and here, tells us why he's looking forward to going client side...



Gareth McPherson, now part of the Virgin Active group.



#Newsmaker: Gareth McPherson takes on dual role as Publicis Machine CCO, MD

Jessica Tennant 28 Mar 2019



❏ ***Congrats on your appointment. How do you feel about leaving the agency environment to work on the client-side at Virgin Active?***

I'm excited for the challenge. Having spent my entire career on the creative advertising side, I've been exposed to multiple client challenges and industries. I think the shift of focusing on one single brand creates the opportunity to really get stuck in and hopefully create maximum impact.

❏ ***What is your involvement in Virgin Active's business transformation journey / marketing strategy?***

Very much part of it, along with the other leaders in the business. A strong strategy has been set and I'll be heavily involved in implementing this, along with building on all the brand's previous successes.

“ Today's CMO is about much more than brand health or awareness – although of course these matter. Today's CMO has to ensure these elements penetrate to impact customer experience, product, ROI and more, for a holistic brand experience. In this format, marketing is at the core of any business transformation journey. ”

❏ ***What excites you most about the company/brand and marketing it in particular?***

I've always admired the Virgin brand: the entrepreneurial mindset it encapsulates, as well its tone, very much mirror my values and ambitions. I'm looking forward to working in the Virgin way.

■ ***What will you miss most at Machine?***

The people, creative culture and the clients. I've thoroughly enjoyed my time at Machine, and the past few years have really shaped me into the style of leader I am today. After a very successful end to 2019, the agency finds itself in a great space having acquired more brands.



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Machine_ 3 Dec 2019



I know big things await for the agency in 2020 and the leadership team will take it to even greater heights. I'm looking forward to watching the success from the sidelines.

■ ***Tell us a bit about your experience and how this has equipped you for your new position.***

I'm a creative at heart and I think creativity is the best skill to practice in this disruptive world. In fact, creativity is one of the skills the World Economic Forum identified as critical for success in today's tech- and data-driven world.

Relevance and problem solving are also key and the more you can practice creative thinking, the better.

■ ***What do you love most about your career and the industry you work in?***

I love brands and working with people. Our industry requires constant collaboration and to practice the two things I love is really great.



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■ ***What are you most looking forward to?***

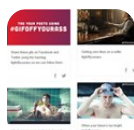
The focus. I'm really looking forward to be focusing on one brand and hopefully the impact I can make with it.

■ ***What's at the top of your to-do list?***

Check-in with leadership and teams. Making sure everyone is aligned to key tasks and then setting my to-do list and starting to action each item. Those who know me know I'm super action-orientated.

■ ***What are you currently reading/watching/listening to?***

I consume loads of media. I watch series, sport and documentaries. I also read up a lot on points of interest during the day. I've always had a curious mind, and I think that may be a factor in why I pursued a career in the creative-thinking field.



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■ **Tell us something about yourself not generally known?**

I buy Lego pretending it's for my kids... but actually it's for me.

For more info, visit [Virginactive.co.za](https://virginactive.co.za) or follow the club on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Pinterest](#) and/or [LinkedIn](#). You can also follow McPherson on [Twitter](#).

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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