

Natasha Mkhize, brand and marketing manager at Curro

 By [Shan Radcliffe](#)

14 Apr 2021

Natasha Mkhize, brand and marketing manager for Curro Holding's network of schools, shares with us the value of growing up with a strong role model, and explains what it takes to market not just a 'moment', but a lifetime experience.



Natasha Mkhize

Tell us a bit about yourself...

I was raised by my strong and determined grandmother in the humble township of Gugulethu in the Western Cape. Gugulethu means 'our pride' in isiXhosa and true to where I come from, I am my grandmother's pride and joy. She wanted nothing but the best for me and taught me resilience, perseverance and that the key to unlocking your future is to read and to be educated. She always used to say,

 *Your mind is your power. You can be anything you want to be, all you need to do is read and go to school and empower your mind.* 

And today I know I am exactly where I need to be, part of the education sector.

Before finding myself in the education sector, I ploughed through years in the FMCG and retail sectors. I paid my marketing and advertising school fees by working in advertising in account management across FMCG brands. I did a few courses in marketing and business management to keep me afloat and then did my post-graduate diploma in business administration at Stellenbosch University. While doing so I worked in the retail and FMCG sectors in brand management across various media and digital channels, as well as with in-store shopper experience tactics in both formal and informal shopper touchpoints.

It was in 2019 that I moved into the education sector with Curro Holdings Ltd and also completed my master's degree in business administration through Stellenbosch University. At Curro, my main role is to manage the brand vision, equity and

market position of the company as well as to create a positive brand identity for all stakeholders. I also develop, establish and maintain marketing strategies to meet brand-specific objectives and I support the schools on all strategic elements of the Curro brand.

■ **Your experience spans such a wide variety of brands... What are some of the biggest differences you've found working in the education space to the more general consumer-based brands?**

The main difference is that you are marketing a basic need – quality education for the future of South Africa. This cannot be augmented as a consumable product, it is an imperative. Consumer-based brands sell a dream (a façade, a place or a thing to escape) while education gives you a right of passage that is real and tangible; it is something that you have that cannot be taken away and it's something that you can build on from nursery school to tertiary level. The 'consumer' evolves and grows within the education sector. It is not a moment, nor a memory but a lifetime experience.

■ **What is it you love about the education industry and your role in it?**

I love that I am part of an industry and, more specifically, a brand that nurtures and celebrates the future of South Africa. I am encouraged and fulfilled by being part of a brand that celebrates the individual and considers what is best for the learner – be it through platforms that allow them to be creative, the best in sport or to perform academically. Education is there to spark and ignite a hidden talent and I am responsible for sharing this with our society; showcasing an opportunity to parents for their children, and to the youth, that their future can be bright and prosperous.



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■ **What are some of the biggest lessons you've learned from your experience in the sector?**

The importance of brand reputational management as it is important to be very transparent. Education is built around trust and heart, not just a need. It is important to be clear and transparent in all our communications, both to current and prospective parents and learners. There is also not a one-size-fits-all approach or a generic approach, you need to be hyper targeted so that you can be relevant and remain top of mind across a broad audience as we offer education across the learners' development cycle from being a baby, to a teenager, to an adult.

■ **What do you believe are the most successful channels for your brand's communication and why?**

Community above-the-line channels such as community radio and newspapers as well as digital platforms (for both parents and learners); and most importantly, community engagements at school. It is important to not only say who we are but to showcase our brand offering by sharing our learners' stories. For a parent it is important to know that their children are in a safe space for growth and for learners it is a space of belonging. Therefore, it is important to use platforms that showcase a *real* experience and digital platforms allow for sharing of experiences and engagements.

■ **Do you feel branding for the education sector comes with a higher level of responsibility given the target audience than other consumer brands?**

Most definitely. As mentioned earlier we service a very wide audience with a need state built around trust; so, it is important that our branding and messaging are inclusive and resonate with our audience.

■ **How do you plan on building the Curro brand going forward?**

The brand is centred around our learners; we offer quality education for future leaders. This is translated in the curriculum and extramural activities we offer to ensure that we are nurturing not only young minds but well-rounded future leaders. We therefore need to make sure that this forms the basis of all our marketing strategies, be it in the classroom or outside of the

classroom.

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

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