

Digital doyenne Jeanine Ferreira



By Leigh Andrews

4 Aug 2016

Currently portfolio manager of digital marketing at Vodacom, Jeanine Ferreira was one of the 'digital marketer of the year' finalists at the [2016 IAB Bookmark Awards](#) and also selected as Vodacom marketer of the year by agency partners. She lets us in on her female career inspiration as well as the importance of creating alternative digital solutions for international needs.

Ferreira says she's lucky to work in an exceptionally strong and competent team and lists her biggest highlight at Vodacom thus far as the international best practice and opportunities she's been exposed to through the Vodafone Group. She says, "Engaging with colleagues from all over the world and sharing thoughts and views are priceless – especially in our industry!"

Ferreira adds that digital marketing is embraced by the company's Exco, which gives them the space to innovate and try new things. Ferreira confirms that Vodacom as an employer invests heavily in their staff, as she was chosen to be part of a senior management development programme and also more recently a mentorship programme for female leaders. So, while they work hard, they also play hard, which she calls the perfect balance.

Industry imperfect: Lack of gender balance

Something not so perfectly balanced is whether enough women are getting a chance to shine in their industry and shatter that oft-referenced glass ceiling. Ferreira says: "Unfortunately not, especially in the historically male-dominated tech industry. I am, however, seeing a definite shift in the way some big businesses are defining a 'high-performing employee' and that makes me excited about the future. Women bring a completely different view and sometimes even skill set to the table and it's evident that companies that embrace this and understand its importance are propelling themselves into the future. The 'boys' clubs' are slowly but surely being replaced by integrated teams that feed off each other's strengths and skills."

More than this though, she says we need societal change and to educate young girls. That's why Ferreira is so proud that Vodafone CEO Vittorio Colao is part of the HeForShe UN Women initiative. Through his leadership and commitment, Vodafone will bring mobile education to three million refugee girls in Vodafone markets by 2020. The fact that South African Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka is the director of UN Women makes her even prouder to be a South African woman. Her current female work inspiration, getting it right and making business work in unexpected ways, is Sheryl Sandberg internationally and Thuli Madonsela locally.



Ferreira (R) with Shivani Naidoo from Vodacom's digital retail marketing and Alicia Kruger from Vodacom's digital brand marketing, with their #Creative award from Twitter for the Summer 2015 Flock to Unlock campaign.

Ferreira says, "This quote from Sandberg sums up her drive to change the way women are viewed in the workplace and also how it's our responsibility as a community to embrace young girls and their leadership skills. **'I want every little girl that is told she's bossy to instead be told she has leadership skills'.**" Madonsela's resilience also amazes Ferreira and her story inspires her, which is why she lists her as one of the strongest and most inspirational women she'd love to spend time with.

Inspiration aside, we still have a long way to go. Ferreira lists the following specific challenges females face in the workplace:

- Paid maternity leave - there are actually companies out there that still "punish" women for getting pregnant and being forced to take unpaid leave.
- Lack of female role models stepping up – More successful women need to engage with young girls and become mentors to them. We need to lead by example and realise that we have a responsibility to be part of the change.
- Women don't speak up – There's a fear of even more discrimination when it comes to issues like sexual harassment. Shout out to Doctor [Yumna Moosa](#), who took to YouTube to expose issues in the hospital she works. We need more brave women like you!
- Work-life balance is not embraced by business – Women are still responsible for most of the domestic and child-care responsibilities and companies across the world are struggling to integrate this into their policies. Initiating change is hard, especially in "old" non-agile companies.

Talking us through the current digital landscape in SA then, Ferreira says digital is definitely being embraced by South African business: It's taken a while, but most major players are now on board and understand the importance of not just marketing your products and services digitally, but also digitising your offerings and customer experience.

Making local digital mobile magic

There's a big drive to migrate every single South African with a handset from 2G to 3G and ensuring great connectivity – even in the most remote areas of our country. She's also seeing more tech start-ups than ever before, as well as a definite theme of education and empowerment across Africa.

But you have to be fast to catch-up, as digital marketing is constantly changing, with ad blocking forcing the industry to be creative and find alternative ways to communicate with its audience, as banner ads and social profiles are no longer cutting it. That's why marketers are leaning more and more towards content marketing, integrated activations and creating utility for users online. "As a people, we are storytellers, so the work coming out of South Africa currently is of an extremely high standard," she confirms.



As digital isn't location-based, you can literally see work form across the world with the click of a button, so local marketers tend to compare ourselves with Europe or America. Ferreira says this isn't necessarily wrong, but that it's important not to lose sight of our market's needs and abilities to interact online. We have all the skills to create extremely complex campaigns or solutions, but data is still expensive and not every South African has a smartphone, so the challenge is to create solutions that work in an African context. "Although it might look basic, the majority of the time it serves a much bigger audience than complex, data-heavy solutions," she says. Video and social media drives 80% of all data consumption online, so we need to look at how to offer this to local consumers in a cheap and 'basic' way, such as the product developed in India and recently launched in South Africa by Vodacom called [Video Play](#). With it, users can watch a full video for as little as R1 that's downloaded overnight onto their devices, eliminating the high cost of streaming, answering the need to consume content in a cost-effective way.

So, she concludes, "I don't think we lag behind. I feel that we are creating alternative solutions for international needs, and that is exactly what we should be doing."

Take note, digital marketers! Follow Ferreira [on Twitter](#) and [click here](#) for our #WomensMonth coverage in full.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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