

# Diving over the Digital Edge: Luvuyo Mandela, Nick Terry, Mel Attree, Jason Xenopoulos & Thulani Sibeko

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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This year's Digital Edge speaker line-up is impressive. We spoke to five of this year's speakers, each inspiring in their own way...

Take social entrepreneur with the famous last name, Luvuyo Hlanganani Mandela. In addition to his role as Lead Advisor; Tyathumzi Advisory Co-Founder & Chairman; he's passionate about youth development and empowerment and feels we need to find a compelling solution to move on, while shifting the conversation to move us all forward.

Or Nick Terry, CEO of TMARC, one of SA's leading mobile platform companies that works for 8 of the top 10 FMCG brands in SA and recently joined WPP, set on developing "the personalisation of consumer experiences". Terry's led a 25-year FMCG career and is passionate about the new world of marketing.

Then there's Mel Attree, director of content strategy at Ogilvy who left a traditional PR role in 2006 with the realisation that she was "a mediocre journalist who would have a better career in advertising and PR", to do 'cool web PR stuff using the internet' in digital and hasn't looked back, creating social media campaigns before social media was even a thing.

What about Jason Xenopoulos, CEO and Chief Creative Officer of NATIVE VML who studied Film & TV at New York University and was the youngest CEO of a JSE-listed company at the age of 28 with Metropolis Transactive.

Lastly, we chatted to Thulani Sibeko, Managing Executive - Group Marketing, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Nedbank. He studied Accounting up to Bachelor's Degree level but says his professional upbringing was in the FMCG industry and feels he benefited from international exposure through studying and working in 7 cities across 3 continents.

Who better to share some insights into how all things digital have changed life as we know it?



Mandela, Terry, Attree, Xenopoulos and Sibeko

## ■ 1. Let's focus on the importance of digital - is there anything you can think of that doesn't benefit from digital/tech innovation?

**Mandela:** It's quite difficult to think of anything that is not effected by digital as long as we confine our thinking or scope to the developed urban hubs, economic centers and communities on their fringes. But if we extend our scope to South Africa's underserved and/or unreached township and rural communities, we begin to see how poorly served by digital and/or tech solutions our country actually is, largely due to non-affordability of tech infrastructure. Consumption and engagement of viable digital/tech solutions is uncommon and not much a real option for a significant portion of our population. There are various efforts to extend access to digital and make 'free information' available to more South Africans, but these are few and far between. In reality, mobile phones are the primary tool for access but to be honest, very few of us have [Ludwick Marishane](#)'s creativity, determination and patience to consider, research and develop a solution using a basic mobile phone.

**Terry:** The only two human certainties are death and taxes. I can e-file, but death is not online yet!

**Attree:** We live in a time where digital/tech and innovation is part of our daily lives, it helps us perform tasks and connect with others quickly and easily. The 'always on' expectation comes with its own set of problems (and sometimes parasocial behaviour), however.

**Xenopoulos:** Life! Relationships! Self-awareness! Creativity! Only kidding... well, half-kidding. Ariana Huffington says that "hyper-connectivity is the snake in the Garden of Eden," and I totally agree with her. I am firm believer in the transformative power of digital technology, but I am also acutely aware of the dangers. We need to differentiate between connectivity, and true human connection. We need to ask ourselves how the internet's promise of egalitarianism and mass democratisation led to the biggest concentration of corporate power the world has ever seen? Technology is, as Terence McKenna says, "the real skin of our species" but, as such, we need to be aware that the technology we create recreates us.

**Sibeko:** I've accepted that we live in a digital or tech world. As I look at objects on my desk and those I can see through the window, they've all been touched by digital or some tech. I almost thought the flower beds are an exception, until I remembered that the sprinkler is automated digitally...

## ■ 2. Explain the concept of digital storytelling, the backbone of any marketing today.

**Mandela:** I think of digital storytelling as "bang for buck" storytelling. The buck - in the consumer's case - is both our time and money. Digital has, in one way or another, drastically shortened our attention span. We want things to happen now and are quicker to move onto the next thing if our attention is not grabbed. Without belabouring the point: Digital storytelling has to do so much in much shorter spaces of time.

**Terry:** The 4Ps of marketing remain the backbone and storytelling has always been key, digital adds to the ability to communicate the story.

**Attree:** Humans have been telling stories for generations. Digital provides us with easier, more dynamic, multimedia ways of telling those stories. We're able to reach people on multiple devices, allowing people to pick and choose how they follow stories and start conversations.

**Xenopoulos:** I'm not sure that there is a single concept behind "digital storytelling". The foundations of narrative have remained unchanged for thousands of years and are likely to remain unchanged for thousands more. That said, the introduction of digital technology has added previously unexplored facets to storytelling. Today, linear stories are giving way to narrative worlds - what Gaston Legorburu of SapientNitro refers to as the shift from storytelling to 'storyscaping'. From a marketing perspective, the ability to transform a linear brand story into a participative, multi-threaded narrative allows marketers to drive much deeper engagement. This is important because people are more likely to remember things that happen to them personally than they are to remember things that happen to someone else. It is a shift from story-telling to story-doing. But with each new iteration of our connected mediascape, additional dynamics emerge. Computers brought interactivity, the internet brought connectivity, mobility opens the door to location-based storytelling, virtual reality promises total sensory immersion, and so it continues.

**Sibeko:** Storytelling is one of the oldest human art or science. It's been used to inform, persuade, entertain, educate, and sell. Digital storytelling borrows the ancient principles of great storytelling and applies them to the modern context of the plethora of digital media. The new context has shifted the power from the storyteller as the new media promotes uncontrolled dialogue of the same story.

### ■ 3. List the three digital innovations that have changed your life.

**Mandela:** Communication gadgets/tools - our generation has brought a new meaning to working with our hands; social media, a gift and a curse; and internet/search engines - when last did you use Encyclopedias for research?

**Terry:** Mobile phone - to state the obvious; Wi-Fi - Welcome to "The Connected Age"; Whatsapp - fast, free and can be grouped.

**Attree:** My iPhone; social media; and curated content apps.

**Xenopoulos:** The internet; social media; and mobile - boring but true.

**Sibeko:** The internet - I'm a big Google fan; the tablet - with the iPad, I can carry with me books, photos, emails, presentations, contact lists, navigation and games - all of this weighs less than 2kg.

### ■ 4. Is SA - and the rest of the continent - on par when it comes to global digital innovation? Share your thoughts!

**Mandela:** No. We need more affordable access.

**Terry:** Yes and no - connectivity costs and speed are still a barrier to digital adoption.

**Attree:** I think so, we have plenty of creativity in SA and a fierce interest in anything that is digital and innovative. Africa is a unique melting pot of cultures with a rich storytelling history that adds unique thinking and creativity.

**Sibeko:** While Africa has made its mark with digital innovations like Please Call Me (SA), [Mubser](#) (Egypt) and [Cardiopad \(Cameroon\)](#); Europe, Asia and North America seem to dominate. Digital innovation is probably pre-disposed to strong legacies of technology - hence the advantage to developed countries. However, with the growth of tablets and mobile phones and the democratisation of programming, the barriers of entry are becoming lower. If we accelerate education development in sciences and entrepreneurship, Africa will increase its share of digital innovations.

### ■ 5. Who are your personal inspirations/mentors?

**Mandela:** Musa Kalenga's a friend (humble brag). I respect for all that he shares. I love the waves he's been making.

**Terry:** Warren Buffet still seems to get by without a lot of digital; Steve Jobs was the best digital designer, he understood how to create desire on steroids; and Sir Martin Sorrel, who built the best and largest traditional/digital marketing company.

**Attree:** I'm inspired by great work; art, multimedia stories, music and good conversations. No real mentors as such, I am a bit of an ADD magpie, so I prefer to grab inspiration from many different sources.

**Xenopoulos:** The people that inspire me are those who have journeyed deep into themselves in order to uncover who they truly are.

**Sibeko:** My dad and [Dr Ben Carson](#), the neurosurgeon and author.

#### ■ 6. Who's getting it right in terms of digital at the moment?

**Mandela:** I can't really say. I'm often at odds with the choice of opting in or out of the 21st Century's version of *The Truman Show*. I can't help but wonder if we've got a clear understanding of how instantaneous and far-reaching this thing called digital is. I'm eager to hear what the digital fundis have to say...

**Terry:** TMARC - of course! Also Uber, because whether you're aged 16 or 66, more are experiencing it every day. It's proving to be a massive disruption. And King Entertainment, makers of Candy Crush, as it's driving massive consumer participation.

**Attree:** Anyone who is embracing the idea that good creative content can drive a message and conversation via digital. Anyone who is actively collaborating with content creators and who understands that creativity sometimes comes from unexpected sources.

**Xenopoulos:** I'm not sure that there is a "right" or "wrong". For me, the best use of digital is when it is seamlessly integrated into a bigger canvas... when the technology becomes invisible. From an agency perspective, DROGA5 has done some really great integrated work. They understand the overlap between marketing, technology, storytelling, and popular culture. Individually speaking, Chris Milk has been pushing the envelope in terms of new technology and he is proving to be a real pioneer in terms of what is possible with new storytelling tools like interactive video and virtual reality.

**Sibeko:** Apple - their ability to understand "where the puck is going to be" and the creation of an ecosystem that supports their business model has brought them great success. Social media networks like Facebook and Twitter are also onto something amazing.

#### ■ 7. What are you most looking forward to from Digital Edge Live?

**Mandela:** A day filled with ideas from people who work tirelessly to find relevance and add meaning to the many stories they tell. Then ending the day off with nuggets from Spike Lee.

**Terry:** An update on current and new thinking - local and global ideas that need exploiting. Good conversations with local leaders of the digital field, and simply being in the room.

**Attree:** Being exposed to other people's experience of storytelling and digital collaborations. I'm keen to hear the insights of others and learning more about the different approaches that are happening in the industry.

**Xenopoulos:** I am eager to hear the many different perspectives on storytelling in the digital edge. And, of course, Spike!

**Sibeko:** Inspiration and reflection.

Seems the Spike Lee excitement is a common point no matter your specialty. [Click here](#) for more on this year's Nedbank Digital Edge Live line-up, taking place on 9 September 2015 at the Sandton Convention Centre. Visit <http://www.thedigitaledge.co.za/> to secure your booking and [here for insights](#) from other speakers on this year's programme.

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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