

Zahra Mirza appointed HKLM MD

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Strategic branding and communications agency, HKLM, has taken another step in securing its future as one of Africa's most progressive, forward-thinking agencies and appointed Zahra Mirza to the position of HKLM managing director and board member.



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The move comes exactly a year after Mirza's appointment as GM of HKLM, and forms part of the agency's plan to build a young, diverse and inclusive leadership team to represent the long-term continuation of the business.

Mirza takes up her new role alongside HKLM founders, executive directors and fellow board members, Dr Sean McCoy and Gary Harwood, who are both still instrumentally involved in the business, working hands-on with clients and in the agency's various work streams.

McCoy says Mirza's exceptional performance as HKLM GM demonstrated that she was ready for the directorship position.

"Zahra was given the opportunity to step up, and over the past year she did, proving that she was ready for this role. She galvanised and motivated the team, helping to secure high-performing business results through the tail-end of the Covid period. She also positively demonstrated new business development and grew existing relationships, all guided by her strong entrepreneurial mindset, commercial acumen and street-smart saviness. We are so fortunate to have her on our team, and believe she is the perfect candidate for this role," McCoy explains.

Harwood agrees, adding that all along her journey, Mirza has enjoyed the support of the entire HKLM team.

"HKLM has always believed in growing talent from within. Zahra has been with HKLM for more than a decade, and during this time has been nurtured along her career path. Working in different departments within the agency has exposed her to a range of responsibilities, all of which she has handled efficiently and professionally. She has really put in a lot of effort, and that has now paid off. It was the right time for this appointment, and Zahra was the right fit for the role," says Harwood.

Mirza holds a Bachelor of Arts (Marketing and Communication) and a Bachelor of Communication (Honours) from Monash

University. She joined HKLM as a brand consultant in 2011, and went on to work in a number of markets and industry sectors across Africa. In 2013 she was appointed head of brand consulting at HKLM – a position she relished and remains closely aligned to.

Mirza says she has seen the agency go from strength to strength during her tenure, citing its entrepreneurial spirit and ability to adapt quickly to trends, make swift decisions and ‘pivot when the world tilts’ as reasons for its enduring success.

Looking forward, she says the HKLM 2026 strategy will prioritise growth. “While our expertise lies in the African and emerging markets sectors, we are actively growing our international footprint. We need to be able to take our African thinking across the globe. Our maxim is, if you can build a brand in Africa, you can build a brand anywhere. Now we want to prove that. Our other future focus is stepping out of the ordinary and expanding our industry sector work. We’ve enjoyed phenomenal success in the financial services, hospitality and mining industries, but there are many untapped sectors where we could make a difference by creating impactful brands,” Mirza explains.

Her vision to achieving all this is simple: she aims to build successful partnerships, successful relationships and from this, successful brands.

“People – both ours and our clients – are the lifeline of our business. I really do believe in meaningful human connections, and that the natural result of those connections is success all round, for everybody. Internally, that is not always that easy, as you want to grow, motivate and nurture staff, but you also want to ensure the best results. I think my biggest challenge in that regard will be creating an environment where people are allowed to fail. It is only through failing that people learn and grow. If I look back at my own success and achievements, they came through failing,” she adds.

There might be a new face at the helm of HKLM, but Mirza promises to maintain the ethos and philosophy that built the agency into the strategically-driven creative powerhouse it is today. “We will stay true to our founding vision as we move into the future,” she says, “and stay ahead of market trends while remaining agile and relevant as we continue to do amazing work.”

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