

A day in the lockdown life of Grey Africa CCO Fran Luckin

 By Jessica Tennant

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"It's a story told in Microsoft Teams calls. Our Ops team have an 8am status call every day with the account management team. After that, we have a creative department catch-up, which is a Teams call with all the creatives on it. That call has two purposes: to check how everyone's doing and to see what everyone's working on and how it's going. We can see who's got capacity and who's feeling a bit swamped, and move resources around accordingly. There are also a lot of jokes and GIF action in the 'chat' sidebar. Then it's pretty much Microsoft Teams calls and WhatsApp messages from 8.30 until about 5 or 6pm: reviews, recordings, one-on-ones with people to make sure they're okay. In addition to the meetings, we're all doing a lot of 'checking in' with people to make sure everyone's okay.

"In between, there's a lot of trying to keep up with emails. And snacking. There's been a lot of snacking. I look at the pile of dirty dishes that has accumulated by the end of the day and I think, did I eat all that?" – CCO at Grey Africa, Fran Luckin's account of work-life in the time of Covid-19.

This is the first in a series of articles, looking into how agencies and agency folk are responding to the crisis and viewing it through a creative lens.

■ ***What was your initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your experience of it been different to what you expected?***

I admit I was excited at the idea of our whole way of working being disrupted, and how we'd work our way through that. It felt like a challenge, and one that could open up whole new ways of doing business if we conquered it. The reality has been all that – but it's also been the discovery that back-to-back conference calls are uniquely exhausting. Also, my house makes a lot of really strange noises during the day and I can't figure out exactly what they are or if I should be worried.



Grey Africa's Fran Luckin is the first South African female jury president at Cannes Lions 2017

Grey Africa 8 Feb 2017



Fran Luckin, CCO at Grey Africa

■ ***Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the agency and creative industry or economy as a whole.***

While there has had to be some adjustment with regard to exactly what type of communications go out at this time, for the most part our clients are continuing with their brand planning and their communication plans. We're using this time to do some deep work with our clients on looking at the road ahead. I don't know exactly how this pandemic will affect our industry as a whole, long term. I don't think anyone does. For now, we are working harder than ever to support our clients. It feels like this will last forever, but it won't. Now is when we need to be looking ahead and planning for the future. Because there will be one.

■ ***How is the agency responding to the crisis and current lockdown?***

We decided to embrace it and tackle it head-on. The skills we develop now, in this time, will be vital to our future success. It's been quite exciting to find out how much we can accomplish under circumstances of extreme constraint.

■ ***Comment on the challenges and opportunities.***

The mental load of keeping everyone together in spirit and keeping people's spirits up, in addition to the normal workload, has been quite intense. On the whole though, we've been able to continue with our clients' work as usual. Creative teams are finding ways to brainstorm over WhatsApp, and reviews and presentations are done over Teams.

The one challenge is, of course, production. We can't get a crew together to do a film shoot and if we want to record radio, it has to be done remotely, with everyone on a Teams call. What's been interesting is that a number of very innovative approaches have sprung up.

Our New York office created a commercial out of footage that Grey employees shot in their homes. Brands are turning to stock footage or repurposing existing material. Or using animation. Radio, I predict, is going to thrive.



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■ ***Speaking of opportunities, the world has really turned to creativity during this time. Why do you think this is the case and what does this mean for the industry, agencies and their clients?***

Creativity thrives on constraint. The more boundaries there are, the more creative you have to be, and so the more creative you get. Now more than ever we need to find new and relevant ways for brands to connect with people. People are confined to their houses, but they still need and want to be entertained, to be given information that can help them, to be reassured and encouraged.

■ ***How has the lockdown affected your staff? What temporary HR policies have you put in place regarding remote working, health & safety, etc.?***

We migrated all our staff to remote working a week before lockdown. We didn't know lockdown was coming but we felt it was the right thing to do to protect our people. We had to make sure we provided everyone who needed it with internet connectivity at home – quite a big undertaking.



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■ **How are you navigating 'physical distancing' while keeping your team close-knit and aligned and your clients happy?**

We're implementing 'physical distancing' but not 'emotional distancing'. Everyone at Grey has a 'coffee buddy' whom we contact every day for a chat or a WhatsApp or a check-in.

Each department meets at least once a day online, not only to catch-up on the status of work but also to check in and see how everyone's doing.

The heads of each department use WhatsApp groups to communicate with their departments, and also to do regular one-on-one chats with people.

We've had virtual happy hours and an ongoing fitness challenge to see who can achieve the goal of exercising every day in lockdown (our CEO has already been disqualified for missing day one).

■ **What are you busy working on? Any initiatives/campaigns relating to the coronavirus?**

We've just launched the Savanna Virtual Comedy Bar – a live online comedy forum for comedians, who of course don't have physical venues to perform in at the moment. The Comedy Bar had its maiden voyage on Thursday night and we had a great (virtual) turnout. #SavannaVirtualComedyBar trended ahead of the upcoming President's address at one point. I think people really needed the laughs. I know I did.

“ 21 days of [#Lockdown](#) is no funny business, but you can make it your business to be funny. We're having Open Mic auditions! Comment with a video of your routine and you could share the stage with the heavyweights of SA comedy at the [#SavannaVirtualComedyBar](#). pic.twitter.com/agHuFCgdqA— SavannaCider (@SavannaCider) [April 10, 2020](#) ”

■ **Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of advertising in any way?**

It's too early to say. I think we're still finding our way through this. I do think that if our future is going to contain more episodes of virus outbreaks and quarantines (as experts say it will), then moving brands onto digital platforms and into digital paths to purchase is going to be vital.

■ **Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?**

This is a unique time for our planet in that pretty much everyone all over the globe is experiencing the same thing. That creates incredibly powerful opportunities for communication. We really are all in the same boat.

■ **Your key message to fellow industry folk?**

Don't give up. This will pass. The skills you're having to develop now will be the skills that help you thrive in future. And by 'skills' I don't mean launching yourself as a blogger or learning another language. I mean the skills of resilience, adaptability and perseverance. You will learn them during this time and they will make you much fitter for what the future brings.

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