



## **A spotlight on South Africa: tackling creative transformation across the region**

### **Tebogo Skwambane, Country Manager South Africa, WPP**

Hi, my name is Tebogo Skwambane, and I'm the new WPP South Africa country manager. I've had such a wonderfully warm welcome since joining WPP a couple of months ago. It has been eye opening for me to join WPP at a time like this. Despite all the challenges, the pandemic, the civil and political unrest that we've experienced in South Africa, and all the loss that both of those situations have brought, WPP colleagues have been exceptionally resilient, demonstrating support for one another and a continued commitment to client and to the work that we need to do.

Teams have worked hard to ensure that clients have the type of client experience that they expect. Our leadership teams have supported colleagues and their families through everything that they have faced.

Let me tell you a little bit about South Africa. South Africa is a country of contrasts and contradiction. At times in the last few decades, South Africa has been the world's darling, with a lot to celebrate. At times we have been a pariah, with a lot to be embarrassed about. South Africa is a country of about 60 million, a young population with at least 50% under the age of 25.

In fact, there's a lot that comes out of South Africa that you'd be really, really surprised about. For example, the CAT scan, heart transplants, the creepy crawly, the thing that cleans your swimming pool, Stephan Pretorius, the WPP Chief Technology Officer. At the same time, we are beset by rising unemployment, as I mentioned, an economy that has suffered a lot with COVID-19. We have exchange rate volatility, fuel price volatility, we have high crime, gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence. We have a lot that we need to work on, a lot that we need to deal with.

But it is despite this, through this, that South Africans continue to demonstrate grit and innovation. It is in this context that I came to WPP South Africa and found a collection of businesses that I think have an incredible opportunity for growth and have an incredible opportunity to have a massive impact not only in South Africa, but across the continent as we collaborate with our colleagues in other African markets.

We have a solid client base. We have long term relationships with clients across a broad spectrum of industries in South Africa. We have incredible talent within all of our agencies in South Africa. Our work in South Africa has been recognised both globally and locally for creativity and for its impact. It is our work that has been purpose driven, that has been particularly powerful and recognised. It is this work that has stretched our teams, that has stretched our clients, and that has forced consumers and customers to have conversations that has been the most powerful, the most impactful. And it's some of this work that I'd like to share with you today.

Gender-based violence in South Africa is a continuous epidemic. In 2019, this reached boiling point. And while this conversation was happening, Ogilvy and the Rape Crisis

Center, its client, with a very, very small budget, did this ingenious, powerful and extremely impactful campaign. Let's take a look.

12,218 people were raped between October and December last year.

Our nation is in mourning and pain.

I didn't know any better. I was too ashamed to say anything.

I'm tired of coming to a gathering where we have to warn sisters because of men.

Gender-based violence is such a focus in our country at the moment.

When raped, use this page.

And it just puts something of a choice in the hands of the rape survivor at that moment.

South Africa has 11 official languages. However, autocorrect only recognises one, English. So Grey and its client, Savanna Cider, decided to decolonise autocorrect. Let's take a look at what they did.

South Africa is no longer a British colony, but our phones are still very much colonised.

Autocorrect only recognises one of our 11 official languages. You guessed it, English.

Every time I want to say "bathong" on a text, then it changes it to "bathing." The Queen's English still rules over our phones, and I have had enough of it. No way.

The worst part, it's killing our Indigenous languages.

You look at the social media, our languages are not actually in use.

We are colonised at some level.

Savanna, the country's most loved cider, got tired of this. Known for its unapologetic commentary on South African life, it declared that it was time to decolonise autocorrect with a simple hack.

Savanna Cider that has enhanced a mobile tool to teach your phone vernacular languages used in South Africa.

Autocorrect doesn't change words saved in your phone's contact list. See? So we created contact files for each of South Africa's other 10 official languages. Each contact file was populated with the 500 most used words in each language. We made the files available for users to download and save. When saved, autocorrect recognises the words and doesn't try to change them. The lowly contact file was turned into an instrument of emancipation, and soon everyone was talking.

It means you can text without pesky autocorrect changing your words.

Ungenaphi Mfondini, which is in Xhosa, right? And that will be able to be typed on your phone. Things like "kunjani", now you can type on your phone.

Users download it and then it saves us a contact on your phone, and you can access all the isiZulu you want. So now you can text your mama, or baba, or ukhohko, [NON-ENGLISH] in your home language. How beautiful is that?

Working closely with senior leaders across all of our operating companies, my priorities going forward center around client, creativity, community and collaboration and talent. As mentioned before, we have an incredible base of clients, we have great relationships with clients. There is an opportunity for us to strengthen these, there is an opportunity for us to take these to the next level. We'd like to focus on building even stronger relationships with existing clients, ensuring that we have bigger relationships, more strategic relationships with clients. And there's a list of clients that we'd like to acquire, big and small clients, clients where we can do even more powerful work, even more creative work and we can have long, close relationships.

On the creative side, we do great creative work. We can take that to the next level as well, bringing our creatives together across all agencies to inspire one another, to network better, to learn from each other, to bring the best of WPP has to offer from around the globe, and to raise the waterline on our creative work. And frankly, to have a much more fundamental impact on the industry in South Africa as a whole.

And finally, talent. We bring in fantastic people. We bring in a diverse group of new recruits. We need to ensure that we know how to allow them to reach their full potential and we find a way to retain our high performers. There's far too much movement away from our agencies. Once people walk into the WPP door, we need to find a way to retain them within the WPP South Africa family. These are our priorities going forward.