

Lauren Burmeister, category lead for gum, candy, beverages & meals at Mondelēz

 By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

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Meet Lauren Burmeister an accomplished marketing and brand management professional who has charted a non-linear career path across industries and continents. From working in recruitment and HR in London to making significant contributions at companies like Disney Consumer Products and Mondelez International, her journey is filled with valuable insights and inspiring achievements.



Lauren Burmeister is the category lead for gum, candy, beverages and meals for Sub-Saharan Africa Mondelez International.

What did you study and how did you end up where you are today?

I studied for a bachelor of commerce qualification and an honours degree in management at Rhodes University. My road to marketing and brand management wasn't linear but helped me gather different skills. After university, I headed to London

for two years on a working holiday. I worked mostly in recruitment and HR for the Greater London Authority, followed by a marketing assistant position at Disney Consumer Products.

This gave me a literal taste for working on brands and probably where I ate way too many Mickey Mouse-shaped sweets! After the UK, I headed to Joburg and started at Discovery Health/PruHealth in sales admin supporting an account manager in London, followed by growing my analyst skills at Nielsen working on a variety of categories and brands.

I then moved to AVI working in shopper/trade marketing and finally brand management for some of South Africa's favourite Bakers Sweet Biscuit brands. An opportunity came along to move to Tiger Brands where I worked on All Gold, Koo and Personal Care brands like Ingrams, Status, No Hair and Perfect Touch. This put me in good stead for my current role as category lead in gum, candy, beverages and meals for sub-Saharan Africa at Mondelēz International.

■ ***What does your role entail?***

I am the category lead for Gum, Candy, Beverages and Meals (GCBM) for Mondelēz International in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) Business Unit and a member of the SSA Marketing leadership team. I am responsible for leading a category team of passionate and creative brand and innovation managers who manage some of South Africa's most loved brands such as Chappies, Stimorol, Dentyne, Halls, Choc Eclairs and Royal Baking Powder.

■ ***What have been some of your career highlights?***

I celebrated my first anniversary at Mondelēz International on 1 April 2023. During this period, my team and I have enjoyed some great turnaround performances with share gains for Gum and Candy brands, whilst driving further demand for Mondelēz products through strong cross-functional relationships.



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Some of my biggest highlights from the year were the Dentyne repositioning TVC and communications campaign driving Oral Care on-the-go, Stimorol making strides in growing SA talent in the SA music industry with the Stimorol Flow Lab, and the approval to increase factory capacity for Halls as the product demand continues to grow.

■ ***What have been some of the challenges?***

For me, it was initially adjusting to a multi-national organisation, having worked at mostly local South African companies before. For our Gum category during Covid, we saw declines in sales as consumers were less sociable, so we faced the challenge of how to get consumers "chewing" again post-pandemic. A few of our brands are also imported, so we have had challenges with rising transport and inflation costs, thus coming up with ways to strengthen and future-proof our portfolios.

■ ***Why has there been an increase in demand for your Halls product?***

Covid had a part to play as consumers were using Halls more for sore throats and home remedies to help them breathe better because of the menthol in the product. We have seen this trend continue into more everyday candy consumption. Halls are not only for when you are feeling sick but can also be a great way to clear the airways, help you think clearer, give you the confidence to take on the moment you are in and "Breathe for it".

■ ***You have been in the industry for 20 or so years, what impact do you want to have in your industry?***

My passion is for growing and coaching the junior team members. I was fortunate to have many great mentors and leaders who helped me understand the industry and grow my knowledge from business acumen, packaging, R&D and Innovation to

analysing data and creating TV adverts. I want to carry on this legacy by passing on my guidance.

■ **What advice do you have to professionals who look up to you?**

We all want to be the ones to crack the next big lasting payoff line, big volume driving campaign, TV advert or scalable innovation, but it comes from lots of hard work and collaboration. Put in the time to get to know your cross-functional teams.

If you are in FMCG, spend a few days in the trade packing shelves and POS stands, to understand the business from the bottom up, get entrenched and know your consumers and don't forget you are a consumer too. Always try to see the bigger picture and be creative!

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

Karabo Ledwaba is a Marketing and Media Editor at Bizcommunity and award-winning journalist. Before joining the publication she worked at Sowetan as a content producer and reporter. She was also responsible for the leadership page at SMag, Sowetan's lifestyle magazine. Contact her at karabo@bizcommunity.com

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