

Motshabi takes over at Lobedu

The Lobedu Communications Group (LCG), the holding company for Lobedu Leo Burnett, Red Nail, Starcom and Lobedu-MS&L, today announced it will effect several key management changes at the top of the organisation and within its advertising agency unit, Lobedu Leo Burnett. Zeona Motshabi, Managing Director of Lobedu Leo Burnett for the past three years, has been appointed Chairperson of the Lobedu Communications Group. Current LCG Chairman Fred Robertson, co-founder and Executive Chairman of the listed BEE company Brimstone, will become Deputy Chairperson.

Robertson, Motshabi and Tholi Ngwenya are the BEE equity partners of LCG which purchased 51% in the group in 2002. Ngwenya will continue his role as strategist to select clients. Reinher Behrens remains Chief Executive Officer of the Group and acting MD of the 'thru-the line' unit Red Nail. Motshabi and Behrens will manage all four companies in the group.

The management of Lobedu Leo Burnett will be headed by a team of two senior staff members who will become managing partners - Rainer Pabst, who will become Managing Director, and Vanessa Pearson, who will assume the role of Deputy Managing Director. Both Pabst and Pearson have contributed to the growth of Lobedu Leo Burnett during their time with the agency. Pabst is currently client services director and Pearson is executive creative director.

Corporate governance

In her new role as chairperson of LCG, Motshabi will continue to play a significant role in Lobedu Leo Burnett. She will also oversee shareholder relations and issues of corporate governance, drive the pursuit of new business, and will continue to focus on the transformation agenda. She will also remain active in industry bodies.

Robertson said, "as black shareholders, we had a vision and a plan when we took over the business. Zeona's ascension to the Chairperson position was a pivotal part of this plan.. We're moving into a new phase in the group, from one of transformation to one of sustained growth. We need someone to actively drive that growth. For me it was important that I hand over the reins to a person with marketing communications experience. Zeona has paid her dues as Lobedu Leo Burnett MD. One other thing: I'm an entrepreneur with interests in various industry sectors. In the various companies I work with, we are making great strides in empowering capable women executives. Therefore I'm excited to hand over the reins to Zeona I am confident that she will take the Group to the next level and look forward to giving her my full support as her deputy."

Under Motshabi's leadership, Lobedu Leo Burnett has regained most of the ground it had lost prior to the LCG acquisition of the 51% stake. At the time of her appointment as MD, Lobedu Communications Group was the first agency group to insist on having empowerment partners physically work in the agency. The agency has a 51% black ownership and also now boasts a 50/50 black/white employment ratio.

Last, but not least, Lobedu Leo Burnett has improved its creativity ranking from a low of 34 in 2003, to number nine in 2005/6. At the recent Loerie Awards, Lobedu Leo Burnett was the fourth most awarded agency.

Future plans

Motshabi, however, is not content to rest on her laurels.

"I must acknowledge the support of the LCG board and our international partners in helping me lay the foundation for the next phase. There is still a lot of work to be done," she says. "Going forward we need to continue to ramp up our performance on all client business. In that regard, we will continue to work towards greater effectiveness and efficiency internally to insure value for our clients. Additionally, we are resolved to continue improving our creative ranking."

All this, she says, must be done with as little disruption to the agency as possible. It's the reason the board, including the international partners, have supported her decision to promote from within.

"Continuity is key - both for our clients and our staff," she says, adding that both Pabst and Pearson are highly respected in the agency and the industry at large.

In his new role as Managing Director, Pabst will assume overall responsibility for Lobedu Leo Burnett. He will also manage the client services, strategic planning, traffic and finance departments. Finally, he will have a strong mandate to bring in new business.

As Deputy Managing Director, Pearson will manage the creative, DTP and production departments. She will also be charged with managing the reputation of the agency.

Commenting on the appointments, Motshabi says that she believes Pabst and Pearson are perfectly poised to take on these new roles.

"Despite having only joined us six months ago, Rainer has proven that he is an 'ad man' through and through. He is passionate about advertising and brings with him a wealth of experience from his six years of international exposure. Importantly, he seems to have a knack for transferring his knowledge - whether it's an international learning to a local client, or his own understanding to his staff.

"Vanessa brings an entirely different set of skills to the table. She's creative and innovative, and constantly challenges her team to think differently, better. She's a great motivator, and has the ability to attract great creative staff. She also has an innate understanding of what drives the business, which is always a great asset for a creative person. Importantly for me, Vanessa has always believed that, together, we could turn this agency around. She's been instrumental in the turn," says Motshabi.

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