BIZCOMMUNITY

Sarah Browning-de Villiers joins Publicis Machine

By Jessica Tennant

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Sarah Browning-de Villiers, former deputy editor at *Cosmopolitan SA* and the gal behind its #TamponTaxMustFall campaign with feminist journalist Jen Thorpe, recently joined Publicis Machine as chief content officer in the narrative content marketing team.



"Publishing has been an incredible first part of my career. It's also where I'm most comfortable, which is exactly why I needed to make this change," explains Browning-de Villiers. "But the thing I'm looking forward to most is perhaps also the thing I'm dreading: being out of my comfort zone and pushed to challenge myself in entirely new ways. For me, that's real, authentic living."

This extends to "the power of authentic, purposeful content, not just to sell a product or an idea but to bring about genuine change", demonstrated by her campaign against 'period poverty' in South Africa.

Here, Browning-de Villiers goes on to say why storytelling is at the core of what she does and more about her latest achievements…

- ***What does the role entail; what do you expect your work day to look like?***
  I'm expecting to be doing everything I can to help spearhead innovative, engaging content across platforms that nourishes deeper and deeper connections between our clients and their consumers. Although the ways in which we present and consume content are continually changing, there is deep power in the art of storytelling – the 'why' that makes an idea, brand, product or service relevant, exciting and accessible to whoever you're trying to reach. That's the sweet spot I hope to hit daily for our clients: when the story connects with both the consumer and the product, service or brand with perfect synergy.

On a personal note, I'm looking forward to working in an agency environment surrounded by a wealth of resources, with the opportunity to learn from some industry greats.

- ***This follows shortly after your collaboration with Thorpe to investigate the plight of tampon tax in South Africa. How do you feel about leaving Cosmopolitan on this note?***
  The #TamponTaxMustFall campaign with Jen Thorpe and *Cosmopolitan* has been incredible to work on. I'm sad to leave it before its formal closure: the petition is still open and it is yet to be lodged with Parliament. But I'm really excited to watch as the campaign comes to fruition.

As I type, there has already been just under 43,000 signatures in less than three weeks – phenomenal! It goes to show the power of authentic, purposeful content, not just to sell a product or an idea, but to bring about genuine change and to raise awareness. I'm really proud of the campaign and I'm so excited to see how Cosmopolitan expands it in the coming months.



#NewCampaign: *Cosmopolitan SA* petitions to end tampon tax

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- ***What will you miss most at the magazine and what are you most looking forward to at Publicis Machine?***
  The team at *Cosmopolitan* – and at Associated Media Publishing as a whole – is a really stellar one. I've learnt a lot from people like Holly Meadows, Cosmo's editor-in-chief, and Elrike Lochner, head of digital and GM for AmpDigital. It's a female-first environment, which makes it rich with opportunity for young women in the industry.

At Publicis Machine, I'm really looking forward to immersing myself with a single, key client and learning the ropes of agency life. Publicis Machine is also home to so many experienced, innovative people and I can't wait to glean as much from them as possible.

- ***What excites you most about this agency and where it's going?***
  Publicis has recently moved all of its agencies in Cape Town into one building and this is reflecting in the increased levels of cross-agency collaboration Publicis is trying to drive. I think this makes it a pretty formidable group: you have so much talent, skill sets and specialities to tap into. Publicis Machine and Narrative – the sub-groups I fall into – also have fantastic reputations for their culture, which is key, since work is a big part of who I am.

- ***What do you love most about your career; proudest achievements?***
  Storytelling – for whatever purpose – is at the heart of what it means to be a person. Stories are at the heart of our identities, our societies – the way we see everything around us and order our world. So, to have that at the core of what you do for a living is pretty phenomenal. It's hard to beat that feeling of a reader, consumer or client really resonating with content and connecting with it.

Personally, I think to have worked on two of South Africa's biggest female titles in my 20s, under some serious powerhouse women – Pnina Fenster, Kerrie Simon-Lawrence, Holly Meadows – makes me extremely proud. I'm also proud to have had my work published in these local titles and with global titles like *Harper's Bazaar* Art (Arabia). But, if I'm honest, my proudest achievements are the relationships I've cultivated and the teams I've been part of. To still have people on speed dial who you worked with years ago, I think is the biggest indicator of how good you are at what you do.

- ***What's at the top of your to-do list?***
  At the moment, it's definitely to figure out my new role, grow new relationships and bring a fresh eye and new perspective to the projects I'll be working on. You only have that objective eye for a short window in a new gig, so you have to harness those insights as quickly as possible!

- ***What are you currently reading, watching or listening to for work?***
  I'm a complete nerd and was recently introduced to the *EconTalk* podcast. It's very American, but the concepts are global and super interesting. I've also finally finished the podcast, *50 Things that Changed the Modern Economy* – similarly geeky, similarly fascinating. I'm about to start on the podcast, *The Craft of Marketing*, and I'm busy reading Tina Brown's *Vanity Fair Diaries*.

- ***Tell us something about yourself not generally known.***

I love writing about art from the African continent (mostly contemporary and modern), and as part of this, I'm a contributor to *Harper's Bazaar* Art (Arabia). And I originally studied theology (I know!) in the UK, which is where I'm from.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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