

Sharon Keith on leaving the Coca-Cola high

 By Leigh Andrews

22 May 2018

Sharon Keith made a name for herself as marketing director at Coca-Cola Africa, but is now bubbling over with the need to pursue other professional and personal interests. Here, Keith shares top highlights from the first Share-A-Coke campaign to the Rainbow campaign that went on to win both a Gold Cannes Lion and the internal Coca-Cola Bravery Award.



Sharon Keith of Coca-Cola Africa.

News has just broken that Sharon Keith is leaving Coca-Cola Africa at the end of June after 13 years at the 132-year-old company in total, six of which as business unit marketing director. She shares why it meant so much to win the internal Coca-Cola Bravery Award, the importance of taking a leap of faith and more!

Share a top highlight from your time as marketing director at Coca-Cola Africa.

I think probably that first Share-A-Coke campaign. We were dealing with 11 official languages and literally millions of names, and so we worked with the Department of Home Affairs to identify and rank South African first names; overcame the technical difficulties for our packaging by enlisting digital printing facilities, and cast a Hollywood dog to play the lead in our commercial – this at a time when dogs were deemed “un-African” across social media in SA!



How 'brand you' came to be

Gary Mortimer 22 Feb 2018



We then flew the dog, plus an understudy, plus trainers, handlers and the rest of the entourage from California for the shoot – such fun! Then we set up the customised vending machines where people could have their own messages and names printed, enabling a number of birthdays, celebrations and even marriage proposals through the mechanic.

I still get asked when we will be doing it again!

■ **Which of the numerous awards received for marketing campaigns run over your time at Coca-Cola has meant the most, and why?**

The South African public has repeatedly awarded Coca-Cola favourite brand status in terms of soft drinks, and in many of the years that I've been around overall favourite brand status across categories – and that reminds me of the privilege of working on a brand as special as this.

“ Happy Birthday, Coca-Cola! 🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉 <https://t.co/2D9RxnCKiY> [pic.twitter.com/KUyFeVCtG6](https://t.co/2D9RxnCKiY) — Sharon Keith (@sharonakeith) [May 8, 2018](#) ”

It isn't my brand or the company's brand, it belongs to the people who put their faith and trust in it. And as a custodian of a brand that is 132-years-old, it has been an honour to have contributed in some small way to what that amazing brand stands for in the hearts and minds of the communities we serve.

■ **Talk us through the internal Coca-Cola Bravery Award – what it recognises, and what it means to you to have received it?**

This was awarded to us for the Rainbow campaign celebrating 20 years of democracy in South Africa. This campaign would never have happened at all if it hadn't been for the collective bravery of the company and the folks at FCB Johannesburg.



Gold at end of rainbow for Coca-Cola RainbowNation

Nahana Communications Group 23 Jun 2014



Because we really didn't know if we could conjure up rainbows in the sky at will.

“ We were working with a crazy guy from New Mexico or Arizona or somewhere, who claimed he could produce rainbows, as long as a few ingredients were in place... sunshine, water, the right angles and a sprinkle of magic. Sounded quite far-fetched to me. ”

Nevertheless, we flew him and his equipment out to SA and promised ourselves that if it was a dismal failure, it would never see the light of day.

But it worked, and it was magnificent, and the bravery award acknowledged the fact that sometimes you just have to take a leap of faith and try something. No amount of research or risk assessment or hunting for “has it been done before” would have helped us make a better decision.



"Marketing's common sense - anyone can do it." Well, maybe not.

Sharon Keith 10 Feb 2012



Here's to all the fizzy success of the future! Contact [Keith](#) or [Coca-Cola](#) on Twitter for further updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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