

Brian Mtongana talks executive creative director role at Woolworths

 By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

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After more than 13 years at retailer Woolworths, Brian Mtongana was recently appointed as executive creative director of the brand.



Brian Mtongana: Source: Supplied.

Bizcommunity spoke to Mtongana about his future vision for Woolworths and what inspires him every day.

■ ***Congratulations on your new appointment, how do you feel about it?***

I feel really honoured and privileged to be the creative custodian of this incredible and much loved premium South African brand and to be part of a new journey as we take the brand to new heights.

■ ***What is your vision for yourself in this new role?***

My vision is to shape and refresh the brand to make it more exciting, relevant inspiring to our customers. It is to also dial up creativity to drive more emotional connection to the brand.

■ ***You have been at Woolworths for 13 years, how will you use that experience going forward?***

Experience will be key as I have a deep understanding of the brand, having been design director for all these years overseeing branding, communication design and packaging design, and having lead and collaborated on award-winning projects which have been recognised locally and internationally. Now I will be looking into how do I help dial up emotional connection and relevance to South Africans through innovative brand communication.

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

There are many but I will count only a few. Designing the space suit patch for Mark Shuttleworth when he launched to the International Space Station was a highlight. Designing the official invite for the 2010 Fifa World Cup Confederation Cup which was hosted in SA and working in Australia in 2018.

I have also been jury president of the Creative Circle Awards and jury president for the Loeries (student awards) and helped the businesses win awards locally and internationally. I've also had the privilege of travelling the world for trends and research which has broadened my knowledge and exposure to the world of retail.

▣ ***What inspires your creativity?***

Everything! Food, music, nature, culture, travelling as I'm very curious. Human behaviour also inspires me as I like observing how humans respond to different situations. I'm generally a sponge and thoroughly enjoy reading and learning new insights through books, podcasts and digital media.

▣ ***What makes you a great leader?***

I learnt something recently that stuck with me. A good leader takes people where they want to go, but a great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but they ought to go. I also believe a great leader is a good listener. We have two ears and one mouth and there's a reason for that. We must use them in that ratio. We also have two hands and one mouth. We must use them in that ratio too. But more than anything, lead with integrity and empathy. You don't have to have answers for everything, seek counsel from your team so they may feel empowered and part of the journey and decision-making.

▣ ***What do you think are some of the key challenges in retail branding in the current climate?***

I think it's relevance and standing out in this highly competitive environment. Everyone has raised the bar, branding and brand communication has never been more important than now as customers have far more options than ever before. We as a brand have always been a leader in retail branding and we need to keep stretching ourselves and adding excitement to keep our leadership position.

▣ ***You were a Loeries jury president for the student awards, how was the experience?***

The experience was incredible. When you judge you learn so much from your fellow judges in terms how they see and evaluate work, but also the work itself is so inspiring and you also learn about how some people solve business problems through creativity and innovation. Through judging you also learn about different creative approaches and the culture of other regions such as the Africa Middle East region which is rich in nuances, insights and creativity overall.

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 SiMags, Sowetan's lifestyle magazine. Contact her at karabo@bizcommunity.com

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