

Deirdre King, Jacaranda FM's first female MD



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Whilst the world was adapting to Covid-19, Jacaranda FM was transforming from the top, down. Deirdre King is the first female managing director of Jacaranda FM and she met and lead the team during the strictest lockdown period. She committed to ensuring that no person lost their job during the pandemic, and kept that promise!



Deirdre King, managing director of Jacaranda FM

■ Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I can tell you a lot about myself! Those that know me will tell you I'm no fading wallflower and my intuition is stronger than Philicity Reeken's Chili sauce (which is delicious by the way). I'm a passionate leader of people, and my two fur babies; Emma and Olivia are the boss of me – they have been my colleagues for over a year now. I feel deeply connected to those around me and I've spent my career learning how to create and perfect brand experiences for consumers.

■ You're the first female managing director of Jacaranda FM. Tell us more about your role here.

I connect a lot of dots. In radio, you have highly specialised employees ranging from on-air talent to sound engineers, journalists, and research specialists. Part of my role is to ensure these team members are supported with a clear vision and the tools to perform in this high impact and agile environment.



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I do believe that not having radio experience has allowed a fresh approach to the way things are traditionally done in radio which has lead to a lot of exciting changes and innovation at Jacaranda FM.

■ Could you briefly tell us about your career?

I didn't end up in my initial idea of a career. During my law studies at the University of Pretoria, I worked at the Irene Film laboratories. A deep passion for film sparked a career in content, with post-production, and then television commercial

production.

After a bit of grease behind the wheels, I started a successful integrated marketing communications agency – Purple Apricot, and enjoyed a stint at Mortimer Harvey where I was the business unit director in the Below the Line and Public Relations division for FMCG clients in consumer goods, retail, pharmaceutical, media, and TV (BBC and Scripts Network (Food Network and travel channel.) I did similar work setting up a new retail division at Joe Public, another prominent agency.

One of my proudest career moments remains catching the eye of The Walt Disney Company who asked me to head up Marketing & Communications for Africa. The role required an in-depth understanding and passion for content, laced with super-size doses of creativity – If you want a masterclass in creative content development, work across multiple lines of business and different global brands including Disney, Disney Pixar, ABC, Marvel and Star Wars. I can't express the knowledge I acquired in my time there well enough.

Before joining the Kagiso Media team, I was general manager of Brand Experience and Crisis Communications (India, Middle East, Africa) for Nando's; A South African brand most marketers consider the holy grail of marketing output – it's there that I finessed the skill of brand building through experience – a skillset highly valued in the post-Covid business landscape.

■ ***As a female leader, have you faced any challenges in the industry? If so, how did you overcome them?***

Yes, most women have but I've never focused on them or allowed challenges to stop my growth.

“ *Being unapologetic about who I am and focusing on what I can bring to the table as a professional, instead of a woman, has afforded me the opportunity to be taken seriously.* ”

An issue I do think we need to start speaking up about is how women advance other women in their professional capacity, or rather the lack thereof. I've been disappointed by women who do not openly champion and advance other women – mostly for fear of being overlooked themselves. I think once we let go of the personal competition and embrace collaboration, we will see many more authentic female leaders.

■ ***What is the biggest highlight of your career?***

There have been many, but I think the most rewarding is being part of or having a role in the growth of staff and team members. Seeing people grow, advance and flourish has got to be one of the most rewarding aspects of my career.

■ ***I believe you started an integrated marketing communications agency – Purple Apricot PTY Ltd. What was this experience like?***

I think everyone should have a small business or side hustle at least once in their career. Being responsible for everything

within a smaller business microcosm, really allows you to appreciate specialist skillsets, you develop big-picture thinking, and a clearer idea of how every part of the business is intertwined and dependant on the other.

■ **As a leader, what are some of the characteristics needed?**

Agility and Empathy. Leaders lead people, not businesses, so it's critical to factor in the human element in every transaction, and to embrace the fact that what is today, might not be tomorrow.

“ I think great leaders are also capable of influencing workplace culture in such a way that a brand is built from the inside out. ”

Perhaps the most important characteristic a leader can possess is the ability to empower their team and appoint the right people for the role. This requires acute perception and it doesn't hurt to be an excellent judge of character. When our team wins, I win, the business wins and our listeners win.

■ **What can governments do to help drive female leadership in South Africa?**

Mandated legislation that prioritises female inclusion will continue to be critical – the inclusion of women gives females the platform to showcase their skills and value.

I think the government should legislate pay-parity across all sectors.

“ By paying all employees equally, we immediately elevate women's economic participation, reducing poverty, and stimulating economic growth. ”

■ **What advice do you have to share with the future generation of businesswomen?**

Don't focus on what you don't have or where women were previously excluded – focus on your skills (sharpen them if you need to), and learn how to sell your value in the workplace. Being able to sell your business value is incredibly powerful. Lay off the energy drinks.

■ **As we celebrate Women's Month in South Africa. Do you have any words of encouragement for all the women out there?**

If you have a vision for something that doesn't exist, then go build it. I was so frustrated when I couldn't find the right type of make-up, that I created my own 100% natural mineral pigment make-up that I still use and sell to this day. Everyone has great ideas – few people take action. Success lies in the latter, so whatever your dreams – it's the action you take that matters most.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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