

Savanna's Eugene Lenford speaks to making your brand work

 By [Emily Stander](#)

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Covid-19 has been a difficult time for many industries, and the alcohol industry in South Africa has faced some challenges due to lockdown regulations and bans. We spoke with Eugene Lenford, marketing manager of Savanna, to find out how these challenges can be faced.



Eugene Lenford, marketing manager at Savanna

Lenford deals with end-to-end marketing - strategy development, implementation and execution for the Savanna brand. "Every day is different and is generally filled with a variety of exciting projects on the go, which sometimes brings new challenges for us as a brand team," he said.

Here, he tells us more about his work, how Savanna as a brand has worked through Covid-19, and shares some advice for aspiring marketing professionals...

What do you love most about your work?

The people. I work with such a diverse group of marketers and partners which has allowed us to put the consumer first in everything that we do.

Marketing is not a one-man show - without collaboration, you won't be able to deliver real purposeful work. I feel that this is something we do extremely well on team Savanna and that excites me and gets me out of bed every morning.

How did you end up in marketing?

I graduated with a BTech marketing degree in 2008 and began my journey in the alcohol industry as an on trade alcohol sales representative in 2009.

In 2012 I joined Distell within the brand marketing team. Throughout the years I had the opportunity to work with brands such as Hunter's Cider, Gordons Gin, and Count Pushkin. My brand marketing experience also extends across other alcohol categories such as Scotch Whisky, but none more exciting than my current role as marketing manager on Savanna Cider.

■ **Savanna just won Coolest Alcohol for the Sunday Times GenNext Awards, how are you feeling about that?**

We are grateful to have been voted as SA's Coolest Alcohol Brand – the first year it was introduced as a category.

Receiving this recognition from the public, our much-loved consumers and even those who just enjoy our crisp and dry sense of humour is hard to beat. We have been working tirelessly to create real purpose-driven work over the years and this is a testament to the team's collaboration to uplift a nation through humour.



#OurBestShot a Savanna Premium Cider campaign that talks to the real side effects

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■ **Covid-19 has been challenging for the alcohol industry in South Africa, how can advertising/marketing help ease these challenges?**

Advertising and marketing can certainly play a role in driving an optimistic (yet realistic) view of the future of South Africa. I am aware of many industries, globally and locally, that have suffered tremendously during the last 18 months. It is my belief that we can all play our role in driving responsible consumption, Covid safety messaging and promoting vaccine registration.

Brands have an important role to play within South Africa to help alleviate the challenges this pandemic has caused and to move forward so everyone can experience our "Old New Normal".

■ **What are the best ways to forge strong client-agency relationships?**

Mutual respect. Trust, and have fun.

I say mutual respect because it is a two-way street when it comes to building the relationship with your agency partners. Once that is in place, we have the power to build trust which results in real consumer-centric outputs which allow us to entrench ourselves in South African culture.

Fun – although we are different entities, client-agency relationships are an extension of the brand itself, take the time to share insights, business objectives and celebrate wins. In this new virtual world, it has been difficult but when you can take a moment – don't forget to enjoy the journey regardless.

■ **What is essential when working with new brands and bringing them forward in the market?**

For any type of innovation, I would say that it is critical to understand the consumer need and marrying that with the essence of the brand. Sometimes brands are reactive to the market and provide something that does not meet a specific

need.

■ ***Tell us about some of the projects you have worked on that you are most proud of.***

Without a doubt, it is the Savanna Virtual Comedy Bar. Not only did this project bring home the awards but it was also a platform that portrayed “purpose in action”.



Savanna and Comedy Central Africa continued to show its unwavering support for SA's comedic talent

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Savanna has always been synonymous with the comedy industry but bringing this concept and platform to life is a testament to the great relationship we have with our agency partners. We were able to effectively serve the medicine of laughter to all South Africans around the country and at the same time pay comedians for what they do best. This all happened during the time where stand up comedy was literally at a standstill.

■ ***What advice would you give to anyone trying to enter the marketing industry?***

I have learnt over the years that ideas can come from anywhere. The greatest campaigns, products, partnerships, and platforms come to life by putting our diverse South African minds together.

Secondly, collaboration is key. I know it sounds cliché, but marketing is always a team effort and I have seen that magic in practice when we respect, trust, and have fun with the people we are fortunate enough to work with.

Lastly, I would say that it is important to voice your opinion. It does matter and you don't know where it can take you or the project you are working on. We all have unique backgrounds and experiences, which in many instances allows us to see the world from consumers' eyes. Marketing is 100% about a deeper understanding of people.

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

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