

One Custom's Lisa Hoflinger on her passion for data and what it says about customers

By  Juanita Pienaar

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Understanding customers and their behaviour is at the centre of what Lisa Hoflinger, co-founder and data and customer insights lead at One Custom, loves doing.

Data is her passion and through data they can influence customer behaviour to drive sales and/or engagement. So, with data, Hoflinger and her team build customer understanding. Through intelligent strategy, they define real value propositions that make sense to these customers, and through technology, they deliver relevant communication - the right value to the right customers, creatively delivered, at scale.



She says:

“ My first love is data and the stories it tells about customers – the good and the bad. And more recently, I have seen how this ability can be used to drive great businesses. The real business application is what gets me most excited in my day-to-day. So, I suppose I’m six parts data geek and four parts businesswoman. ”

For Women's Month, we asked Hoflinger to elaborate on her passion for data analysis, her journey in the data/tech space as a woman and to share her personal tips on getting to the top in the marketing industry.

 **How did your passion for data analysis come about?**

I think it started with my first job at a marketing agency in the UK and not having any idea about what marketing is or does (I was fresh out of varsity having studied IT and Physics). Naturally, you go to what you know best. So, in my case, it is data and databases. I started out looking at thousands of records to track incentive programme sales to show campaign wins and engagement results.

I think those early days in my career were also about me showing my worth – it was fun to impress people with database skills, and also to be able to show results quite simply and quickly. I knew I could do it, but I think I have often got quite a kick out of the surprise when others realised I could.

From there I quickly learnt there was a space for me in between marketing and IT and that definitely had to include data! And recently, especially in the last decade, we've seen the need for these two disciplines to be much closer integrated – fortunately for me, with my skills and experience.

■ ***Was it difficult as a woman to break into the industry or is it a misconception that women are rarely featured in the data technology industry?***

I don't think it is hard to start in the industry; the data/tech space in SA is still growing and needs lots of talent. I do believe there is still an imbalance within leadership positions, specifically on the data/digital/tech side of business. Once or twice in the early days in a management position, I was asked in meetings if I would be taking the notes?! But I do think we have moved on away even from a few years ago. These are areas of expertise that have traditionally been dominated by men, so it's still almost surprising to have a woman with a voice in the conversation. Part of me gets a little frustrated by the bit of arbitrary prejudice, but the other part has also always relished that just-prove-them-wrong challenge, and then added to this, something I've picked up more recently, is that:

“ We as women are really tough on one another. I believe this has a little to do with that always-on fight to be heard or taken seriously, but I'd prefer if the default setting was belief and willing others to succeed rather than the opposite. ”

■ ***Do you think the future of marketing will benefit from more female leadership?***

Absolutely. Firstly, we're (just over) 50% of the SA population – there have to be some smart, good leaders amongst us, and then marketing skill, especially in our world, has a lot to do with relevance.

“ Women bring a different context and set of life experience to this. I hope it goes without saying that the broader the diversity in marketing leadership (including gender and ethnicity) the better the results. As a nation, we bring such a rich, but varied set of experiences that I believe we're far better off leveraging as much of this as possible. ”

Finally, business success has a lot to do with EQ and people leadership. In my experience, women are often pretty natural at this when they take it on!

■ ***What are your personal tips on getting to the top in the marketing industry, specifically as a woman?***

1. Do it your way! That way you will be more confident and stand out!
2. Work hard! Do your job to your best ability.
3. Take the lead. People – men included – often just step up into leadership positions. Unfortunately, the default assumption for many women is that they are less qualified or they need to be given the mandate first. Believe in yourself and step up.

■ ***What is your hope for the next or future generations of women in marketing/marketing industry?***

I hope to see more of all this, but just remember to back one another – judge each other by one professional standard, the same as a male in the same position.

■ ***And what is your key message to fellow women in marketing this Women's Month?***

Do it your way, take the lead and don't forget to have fun doing it!

Connect with Hoflinger on [LinkedIn](#) and visit the [One Custom website](#) for more info on the company, what they do and news and updates.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

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