

Behind the wheel of Isuzu SA's marketing: An interview with Ziphindiwe Ngcobo

 By Imran Salie

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As a senior member of Isuzu South Africa's marketing team, Ziphindiwe Ngcobo develops and implements robust marketing strategies that align with the company's business objectives. This involves a careful analysis of market trends, customer needs, and a competitive landscape to identify opportunities and challenges.



Her role further extends to being responsible for sub-divisions that cover product marketing and PR, all the way to the company's brand and sponsorship properties.

She also works closely with various stakeholders across the organisation.

"This collaboration ensures that our marketing initiatives are cohesive and supportive of overall business goals. Regular performance analysis and reporting are fundamental to understanding the effectiveness of our strategies and making necessary adjustments.

"Staying abreast of the latest marketing trends and technologies is essential, and I continuously seek ways to innovate our approaches to remain competitive and meet our objectives effectively," Ngcobo states.

Here we uncover more about Ngcobo and her role as the marketing executive at Isuzu SA.

■ **Share a bit about your background and journey that led you to your current role...**

I have always been fascinated by the power of data and how numbers behave in a pattern. This has always driven a keen interest in me to tell a story through numbers. This has led me to pursue a degree in BCom Marketing Management Science, as it enables you to understand how your marketing decisions impact the organisation.

It's easy for marketers to get caught in the pretty pictures but our decisions need to be fueled by how the organisation operates to avoid the "say-do" gap. We need to be punting lived experiences.

I have very broad experience in marketing with a wealth of knowledge in research and consulting. My professional journey began at African Bank as a research consultant, where I was exposed to various aspects of marketing strategies and data-driven campaigns.

This foundational experience solidified my interest in the field and propelled me to take up a role as an account manager at Millward Brown (now Kantar Insights), where I was instrumental in driving brand equity growth and optimising multi-channel marketing campaigns that significantly boosted the brand value for large corporates operating in SA.

As I progressed through various roles, my passion for creating meaningful and impactful marketing messages continued to grow. I honed my skills in digital marketing, content creation, and strategic planning, taking up increasing responsibilities and leading projects to successful outcomes.

In my current role as a marketing executive at Isuzu Motors SA, I'm thrilled to steer the marketing vision, aligning innovative strategies with business objectives. I manage a dynamic team, and together, we aim to elevate our brand's presence and engagement through customer-centric approaches.

On a personal note, my love for understanding customer behaviour and trends drives my enthusiasm for marketing. I believe that marketing is not just about selling a product, but about creating value and building lasting relationships with customers.

■ **Could you tell us about some of the most significant marketing campaigns or strategies that have contributed to the success and growth of Isuzu in South Africa?**

Our team at Isuzu South Africa has put immense effort into executing impactful marketing campaigns and strategies that have significantly contributed to our growth and success in the market.

One notable campaign was our "D-Max take it to its limits" campaign. The goal was to showcase Isuzu's continued commitment to producing reliable and capable vehicles that enable our customers to take on any terrain. We further wanted to showcase the modern design and styling that is still fit for purpose for off-roading.



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We leveraged multiple channels, including digital, print, and outdoor advertising, creating a comprehensive and engaging narrative around the durability of our vehicles. This campaign resulted in a 20% increase in brand engagement and enhanced our reputation as we began to resonate better with the younger audiences.

Another key strategy has been our sponsorship-focused campaigns. We have recently had our inaugural SA Fashion Week show, which indicates the commencement of a three-year partnership with SAFW. To the world, fashion is about expression, boldness and bravery coupled with functionality. Our Isuzu Mu-X is a vehicle that allows you to #BringIt on and off-road.

Through partnerships and sponsorships, we managed to foster a strong brand affinity and trust among our customers, reflecting positively on our sales and customer loyalty.

These strategies and campaigns, among others, have been pivotal in positioning Isuzu as a reliable and customer-centric brand in South Africa. We continue to learn, innovate, and evolve our marketing approaches to resonate with our audience and meet their evolving needs.

☒ *Can you elaborate on the strategies you employ to ensure Isuzu's brand is well-represented and engaged in relevant sponsorships?*

A key strategy when we design the suitability of sponsorships/partnerships is to see if the entity/platform/person espouses the brand's fundamentals. As a company, we always aim to enable consumers to live safer, more convenient, and bolder lives.

We also understand that consumers need to know that they are able to show up in as many situations as possible and aren't limited by their vehicles or how they're going to get where they need to be.

Often, other brands might be tempted to select their sponsorships based purely on popularity and therefore, anticipated exposure. Although reach is very important to us, as Isuzu SA, equally significant is a synergy in the desire to offer quality and worthwhile experiences to anyone who interacts with the brand's products, services, or people.

☒ *In your experience, what are the most critical qualities and skills that a brand manager or marketing executive should possess in today's competitive business landscape?*

In my experience, a brand manager or marketing executive today needs to embody several key qualities and skills to thrive. Strategic thinking sits at the core, ensuring that our brand direction aligns with broader business objectives and market needs. Adaptability is crucial in the face of market changes and evolving consumer behaviours; it allows for timely adjustments to our strategies to remain competitive.

A consumer-centric approach ensures that our strategies and campaigns resonate with our target audiences, fostering loyalty and enhancing brand perception. Analytical skills are pivotal for making informed, data-driven decisions that optimise our marketing efforts and enhance ROI.

Lastly, a commitment to continue learning ensures that we stay abreast of the latest trends, tools, and best practices, keeping our brand innovative and relevant in the competitive landscape.

☒ *Share a memorable moment or achievement in your career that has been particularly rewarding and meaningful to you as a brand manager at Isuzu SA...*

There are too many to mention, but if I had to pick one, I'd say our recent multi-year partnership with SA Fashion Week is a key highlight. As a brand, Isuzu views itself as stylish and an enabler when it comes to people thriving within their chosen lifestyles. I believe that this collaboration will demonstrate the boldness and versatility of our brand and the people who aspire to or currently associate with it.

🚩 *Take us through a day in the life of Ziphindiwe Ngcobo...*

Each day as a marketing executive is diverse and dynamic, filled with strategic decision-making and operational tasks. I usually start my day early, prioritising tasks, checking emails, and communicating with the team to ensure we're aligned and ready to tackle the day's objectives.

A significant part of my morning is spent collaborating with the team. We might have brief meetings to discuss ongoing campaigns, brainstorm creative ideas, or resolve any challenges. As a leader, I ensure that the team feels supported and motivated, maintaining an environment that fosters creativity and productivity.

Dedicated time for continuous learning and market analysis is essential. I make an effort to stay abreast of the latest trends, technologies, and best practices in marketing, which helps in making informed strategic decisions.

Wrapping up the day involves reflecting on the accomplishments, revisiting the priority list, and planning for the next day, ensuring that everything is on track for continued progress and success.

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