

# Thando Mafongosi, Grey Group Advertising's new strategy director



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Grey Group Advertising Africa has announced the promotion of Thando Mafongosi to strategy director. Mafongosi holds a Bachelor's degree focused in brand management from Vega School and an MBA from the Gordon Institute of Business Science. She has worked in the advertising industry for a number of years, her skills include brand management, digital marketing strategy, advertising, strategic planning, traditional marketing strategy.



## ■ ***Congrats on your appointment. How do you feel about it?***

Thank you. I don't know about you, but because things have been somewhat dark due to Covid, it's taking me a little longer to wrap my head around good news. So, it took about a week to figure out how I feel, but now I can confidently say; I am super excited about my new role.

## ■ ***How and when did this come about?***

It's been months in the making, but it was only official on 1 April 2021. It comes as a result of ongoing conversations with our CSO and CPO about broadening my impact within the agency.

## ■ ***What excites you most about taking on this new role?***

The people development aspect. My role before I joined Grey, had a significant people component which at Grey was set aside to focus on establishing the standard for strategic output for our newly formed relationship with Distell. Having done that for two years and with our brands in strategically sound positions, now is a great time to return to what I think is the best part of my job.

## ■ ***How did you end up working in the advertising industry?***

I was doing a favour for a friend. She had to go get her wisdom teeth taken out and wanted to leave her intern job in good

hands. I had left my marketing assistant job, in search of something different, so I had time.

■ ***What do you love most about your career, the industry and what you do?***

With regards to my career, I love how I never planned for any of it. For someone who didn't know that there were career opportunities in advertising until I was in my honour's year. I'm in awe of just how long I've stayed in the industry, how many opportunities have come my way and how great I've become at what I do.

What I love about the industry is its consistent learning and resilience – the world changes on a consistent basis that forces us to learn about the changes and adapt, if we are going to make work that resonates and works. Resilience, so I don't want to over glamorize any kind of struggle, but I do think this industry builds a resilience that other industries do not. It might be in how many times we hear 'no' but must still come back with more and better. Oh, and I'm also obsessed with how interesting everyone in the industry is...I went to business school and realised how this is a real thing.

I love the fact that strategy feels like just an extension of who I am. The thinking hard, creative thinking, scenario planning, considered decision-making and thought-out communications is very much who I am in my personal capacity. Everything in life is strategy.

■ ***Which are your most memorable campaigns that you've worked on?***

This is a hard one; strategists are rarely credited with successful creative output (no matter how instrumental their work was to achieving the creative output – well, unless you write an Apex/Effies) and I think as a result I struggle with the idea of claiming any creative work as my own.

I can tell you brands that I made a difference to, but I struggle with picking a single body of work that would be the most memorable, also memorable for me might not be for anyone else. It might have been my best strat work yet but didn't result in a big campaign.

I will say though, while it might be on a small scale, I am incredibly proud of the work we are currently doing on Viceroy (from when we took over the account in 2019 – till now). As a brand we are creating some beautiful work that honours the brand's DNA and tells a great story of culture and character even when it's not on trend to do so.

■ ***What have been your creative career highlights?***

Highlights include being listed in the Loeries ranking in 2016; I was ranked as the 2nd most awarded strategist. And then in 2017, I was selected to be a Grand jury judge at the New York Film Festival 2018 AME Awards.

■ ***What is your biggest motivation in life?***

Being able to give people hope, in big ways but also in the everyday things that I do. Hope that they can achieve their goals, hope that they can win in an unlike situation, hope that the opportunities I got may also come their way too...I think

just *hope* in its broadest terms.

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