

Havas CFO Mohamed Bhyat

 By Jessica Tennant

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Earlier this year, Havas announced the appointment of Mohamed Bhyat as its chief financial officer (CFO), taking over the reins from Andrea Bottega.

Bhyat is responsible for the business in South Africa, across the entire Havas Village, which includes Havas Johannesburg, Havas PR, Havas Media and the digital arm, Havas Boondoggle. The role also entails collaborating with the Vivendi Africa team, which includes Universal Music Group and GameLoft.

He is a seasoned chartered accountant with extensive experience working with businesses in marketing and media in South Africa. He was in the role of CFO for SuperSport for over five years, working closely with the CEO. He led Paycorp Holding's finance function as the group financial executive, and held the position of CFO at Primedia Sport, among other organisations.

Commenting on his appointment, he said: "I am excited to have joined the Havas team, leading finance and sitting with leadership team to help drive the business to generate strong profit margins. Havas' culture is centred on the delivery of excellent work to clients, and the business' going commitment to transformation, diversity and inclusion is exemplary, and I look forward to playing my part in making a meaningful difference to our clients, our people and South Africa."



■ ***How do you feel about joining the agency and sitting on the Havas Village's leadership team?***

Excited and anxious at the same time as with any new venture in life. I am excited about working in such a dynamic environment and facilitating the group's ability to make a meaningful difference. I am anxious about joining such a talented, motivated and creative leadership team and being in finance, been the 'boring' one in the room.

Mohamed Bhyat

■ ***What does the role of chief financial officer entail?***

Simply put, it's about making sure we run a profitable business all around. This means, to support the business and the leadership team in achieving our goals of running a successful agency. In this role, I am beholden to the shareholders, my colleagues at leadership, the dynamic team of "Havasians", to our suppliers, clients and partners, and a big part of it is to ensure that everyone has fun while doing their work.

■ ***What are you most looking forward to?***

The current state of the world is such that I have not yet met anyone in person. Everyone is working from home, much of our meetings are virtual. This is a bit old-fashioned but the thing I am most looking forward to is simply to be in the office with my new team members.

■ ***What excites you most about the agency?***

The agency's international reach and footprint. I love working with people from all around the world, from New York to Paris to Cambodia to Australia, and the list goes on. I relish simple things, like the accents and cultures I get to interact with. Equally importantly, the multidisciplinary nature of the Havas Group, within the Vivendi stable, means regular engagement

with Universal Music Group and GameLoft. This coming together of marketing and communications, with entertainment and culture is an exciting point of differentiation.

■ ***Comment on the current state of the industry, how the industry has responded to or is responding to Covid-19, and how you plan to navigate the agency through this.***

As with all industries around the world, our industry is taking strain as our clients feel the pressure of the economic downturn. With challenges, however, comes opportunities, and at Havas, we are well positioned to take these challenges head on and help our clients grow their brands. We are a medium-sized agency that truly behaves like a small agency and this is in our ability to be nimble and agile, and in our ability to shapeshift while staying true to our purpose, to be better partners to our clients.

■ ***You're a seasoned chartered accountant with extensive experience working with businesses in marketing and media in South Africa. Tell us more about your background/experience and how this has equipped you for the role.***

I have to thank my lucky stars every day for having worked in both marketing and media. While I do work in finance, I honestly cannot imagine working in a corporate environment where I have to wear a suit every day! I am grateful to George Rautenbach, for the opportunity to have worked with him at Primedia Sport which led to some amazing personal and professional experiences culminating in the 2010 Soccer World Cup. Also, to have worked for SuperSport International was an absolute privilege. Both these opportunities, and every other in my career so far, have equipped me from a personal and professional standpoint to better fulfill my role as CFO and help take Havas South Africa to new heights.

■ ***What do you love most about your career in finance within the marketing and media industry?***

Both the marketing and media industries are known for a “work hard, play hard” culture and this is a culture I enjoy, and there's the part where I don't have to be the grey suited accountant all the time.

■ ***What's at the top of your to-do list?***

Just get to know the business of Havas better for now and then we can take it from there. The teams in the business have an amazing work ethic so my job is made easy.

■ ***What are you currently reading/watching/listening to?***

In between the new job and training for endurance horse riding, I am not reading or watching anything specific at the moment, maybe except for watching as much sport as my wife allows me.

■ ***Tell us something about yourself not generally known?***

I love the outdoors, so I am happiest when I am outdoors doing something. I have this crazy unexplained passion for Arabian horses, and bees.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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