

Carl Thomen, product marketing lead at Peach Payments



By [Karabo Ledwaba](#)

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Carl Thomen is Peach Payments' product marketing lead, with previous roles including head of digital at Old Mutual Finance and chief customer officer at NONA. At Peach Payments, his responsibilities span Go-To-Market strategy, funnel analysis, sales enablement, marketing analytics, market research, and customer insights.

Thomen holds a BA (Hons) in Philosophy and Classics from Rhodes University, an MA in Philosophy from the University of Cape Town, and a PhD in Technological Ethics from the University of Gloucestershire. He's also certified in marketing by the Product Marketing Alliance and has taught and mentored at institutions worldwide, including Victoria University, the University of Johannesburg, and the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation.



Carl Thomen is the product marketing lead at Peach Payments. Source: Supplied.

■ **Take us through the evolution of your career.**

I started out as an academic, lecturing and researching at the intersection of technology, sport and culture. At some point, actually getting involved with technology became more interesting than just talking about it, and I started building basic websites and writing content for clients I met through Elance, now UpWork.

That rolled into a position running content teams for an inbound agency. From there I moved into managing digital marketing for Old Mutual Finance. After a short stint taking care of commercial functions for a niche software development studio, an incredible opportunity to help build for businesses in Africa presented itself, and I arrived at Peach Payments.

■ **What do you do in your current role at Peach Payments?**

Effectively, I look after the middle and bottom of our funnel so that businesses of all sizes, from the biggest ecommerce players to the smallest side hustles, understand the functionality and value of our products. What we do isn't complicated (we help you buy stuff online), but it is complex. The majority of the merchants we serve are time poor and view payments as plumbing.

Their attitude (rightly, given their need to be everywhere in their businesses all the time) is that it's necessary that it's there and that it works, but they don't want to have to understand the nuts and bolts. My job is to make sure that the journey that starts with considering us as a partner and progresses to interacting with our products and services as they need to, is as

smooth and efficient as possible.

■ ***What interested you in the financial technology space?***

The scale of the problems the industry deals with, like in our case, building payments infrastructure for the African continent, means it's a great place to learn and grow. At Peach Payments, there's an opportunity to make a substantial impact on the lives of the people who run the small- and medium-sized enterprises that drive our economy.

■ ***In a rapidly evolving industry, what are some of the emerging challenges and opportunities you foresee in the payments space?***



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In terms of challenges, the transformation of a cash-based informal economy in South Africa is an interesting one. Mobile money has been touted as a solution for this problem, but it's never really taken off in South Africa the way it has in Kenya, for example. I still think it's a great opportunity though. I reckon blockchain and cryptocurrency present some real opportunities to remove friction from transactional processes (remittances, inter-bank payments, asset ownership and transfer) but the technological and regulatory challenges are big.

■ ***What are the main challenges you face in your role?***

Marketers always want more budget, don't they? Outside of that, prioritisation is a constant challenge when you work in a small team in a scaling business. There's so much stuff you could do - but the question is, what really moves the needle?

■ ***What have been the highlights of your career?***

At Old Mutual Finance, we built a mobile game designed to get people to think about their spending habits. It was a really fun process that ended with a truly unique product. More recently, I've been feeling really privileged being able to make a positive difference to the businesses that Peach Payments serves, by helping deliver experiences that save them time (like our new merchant dashboard) and products that make it easier for them to do business (like our payment links product).

■ ***What advice would you give to aspiring product marketers looking to make a significant impact in the fintech sector?***

Know your customers, and talk to them, often. Even though you have 'product' in your title, and you're going to need to communicate features, benefits and value convincingly, knowing your customer inside out is still the most important thing. When you know your customer well, you start to develop intuitions that drive better ideas and decisions.

The next most important people in your life are your product managers and sales managers, so try to understand their worlds and build good relationships there as well. Product marketers are highly cross-functional, so relationship building is key.

■ ***Having taught students at various institutions, what lessons have you learned that you apply in your leadership role at Peach Payments, particularly in terms of guiding and developing the marketing team?***

First, data helps get things done. Show a result or a trend, and your argument is much stronger. Second, you need to make your processes visible and circulate your work. Get as much feedback as you can - it will help you be better, faster.

■ ***Looking ahead, what are your goals for yourself and Peach Payments?***

Peach Payments wants to help businesses on the African continent grow. It's great to be part of a team achieving that every day. Personally, I just want to keep learning, and elevating the product marketing function at Peach.

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

Karabo Ledwaba is a Marketing and Media Editor at Bizcommunity and award-winning journalist. Before joining the publication she worked at Sowetan as a content producer and reporter. She was also responsible for the leadership page at SiMag, Sowetan's lifestyle magazine. Contact her at karabo@bizcommunity.com

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