

Zahra Mirza appointed general manager at HKLM Connect

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Zahra Mirza has been appointed as general manager of Africa's leading strategic brand and communications agency, HKLM Connect. Mirza has been head of Brand Consulting at HKLM Connect since 2013, a position she will retain. She has extensive experience working across the continent on a diverse portfolio of clients in the travel and tourism, leisure and hospitality, mining and resources, ICT, consumer and financial sectors.



"I joined HKLM as a brand consultant 10 years ago and have enjoyed a particularly rewarding and exciting career trajectory in the last decade working in a number of markets within the African continent and across various industry sectors," reveals Mirza who has a Bachelor of Arts (Marketing and Communication) and a Bachelor of Communication (Honours) from Monash University.

Mirza has long been a firm believer that you have to immerse yourself in the culture of a country in order to understand its nuances. The Covid-19 pandemic, however, has changed the way HKLM Connect is able to experience countries. "We've had to embrace digital transformation in order to pivot our ability to immerse ourselves in our clients' markets online," reveals Mirza, adding that this has required significantly more virtual meetings and months of engaging.

"Relationships have always been key to our success. While meeting face-to-face was not possible during the pandemic, we ensured more digital face time with clients in order to build and maintain these relationships," she says.

In the process of integrating digital into everything it does, the agency has transformed many of its internal processes.

What the pandemic has uncovered is that it is possible to build brands remotely. "Our perceptions about how we can build brands across the continent – and even the world – has changed. The fact that we're no longer restricted by borders has enlarged my vision for HKLM Connect. While we have historically been quite focused on Africa, we now realise that we can take HKLM Connect's offering to a global customer base and take our African expertise to the world," says Mirza.

HKLM plans to adopt a hybrid work model with staff working both from remote offices and in the office. "We've learned that we can work remotely and we have firm rules in place including that cameras must be on so that people can continue to read non-verbal cues. At the same time, however, we recognise that we also need to meet face-to-face in order to facilitate collaboration and brainstorming. There is no question that being in person with the team brings more rigour to the process. A hybrid model will require striking a delicate balance."

Mirza acknowledges that managing the dynamics of remote and in-person work will be a challenge but believes that it's a workable and sustainable solution.

Covid-19, she adds, has forced business leaders to be empathetic and mental wellness has come to the fore. "People are

so important and vital to every business that their wellbeing and keeping morale up has to be every leader's first priority.

HKLM co-founder Sean McCoy says that he is delighted to see Mirza take up the mantle as general manager of HKLM Connect. "I have every confidence in her ability to take the business forward and build off the proud 18-year track record that we have in the industry. Under her leadership, this young, diverse and dynamic management team will flourish and remain well supported by the founding partners who still hold active executive roles on the team."

Gary Harwood, HKLM co-founder echoes McCoy's confidence in Mirza. "I am extremely excited about having Zahra at the helm of HKLM Connect. She has the vision, enthusiasm and necessary business expertise to see the big picture in order to make strategic business recommendations and grow business relationships. Having worked closely with her for the past ten years I know that she is the perfect leader to confidently steer HKLM Connect into the future."

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