

Zanele Kabane talks writing, media and the future

By  Emily Stander

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At M&C Saatchi Abel, Zanele Kabane works creatively as a copywriter on digital campaigns and concept ideation.



Zanele Kabane, copywriter at M&C Saatchi Abel

Never missing a beat when it comes to social media and trending topics, Kabane is particularly passionate about creating a real future for Black women. Driven to create a space one day when Black women can thrive, she is multi-talented and focused on becoming the best she can be.

Here, she tells us more about her work, her life and what she hopes her future holds...

■ ***Tell us a bit more about your role and what your day-to-day looks like?***

On an average day, I'm briefed on coming up with creative concepts for various through-the-line advertising campaigns. This can range from radio and TV scripts to fully integrated digitally-led campaigns. Because my strengths and passions lie in digital, I'm also always writing social content for the brands I work on.

■ ***What was your career path prior to your current role as a copywriter?***

You'll be surprised to know that I didn't even study copywriting or anything advertising-related before I joined the industry. I studied a BA in film and media production, majoring in broadcast journalism at the University of Cape Town (UCT). I then did my honours in media theory and practice at UCT as well.

After my honours graduation, I applied for every internship I could find. This included the O25 Graduate Programme at Ogilvy Cape Town. I got accepted to join the Grad programme at Ogilvy and was told, “You’ll be doing copywriting” – then I secretly Googled what a copywriter was and the rest is history.

■ ***What do you love most about your work?***

My favourite thing is being able to tell stories and create work that makes Black South Africans feel seen and celebrated. Nothing beats someone seeing work I’ve made and feel like “wow, you get me. You really get me”.

■ ***What role do you play in empowering youth in your industry?***

Since I started my journey in a graduate programme, I’ve always understood the deep need to empower youth in my industry. I’ve recently had the amazing honour of joining the IAB Youth Action Council and this means I’ll have the opportunity to not only mentor and support up-and-coming youth in my industry, but I’ll also be able to have a seat at the table and make a real impact from a youth’s perspective.

■ ***What kind of impact do you want to make in your career?***

I’ll be honest, I look around the South African advertising industry and I hardly see any Black women in senior creative positions. While things are slowly shifting, we’re still very much in a White man’s industry and I want to play a key role in transforming that. I want to break all the glass ceilings, take up space and become the powerful person my younger self didn’t even know existed.

■ ***You’ve worked on some campaigns that have won industry awards - tell us about those.***

I’ve had the privilege of working with some of South Africa’s most iconic brands. In my three years of experience, I’ve been lucky enough for some of that work to be awarded. In 2018, my first year in the industry, I worked on one of Castle Lite’s most ground-breaking women empowerment campaigns called “#HoldMyBeer” and this was awarded a Loeries finalist.

In 2020, I worked on one of my favourite campaigns to date – the Volkswagen Touareg Sabbatical campaign – which gave someone the luxury of time to fulfil their dream. This campaign won a Bronze Loerie and received two Shortlists for The One Show awards – which is the world's most prestigious award show in advertising. While these two are career highlights, I can't wait to see what the future holds.

▣ ***What does the future look like for you?***

The future looks bright, Black and female. I see myself being one of SA's most decorated and well-travelled Black female executive creative directors, sitting on several boards of major companies and focusing on empowering the youth, particularly young women in our industry.

▣ ***What other skills and talents do you have, besides your work?***

Besides work, I'm surprisingly good at playing mobile games like Candy Crush. I also love blogging and my golf swing isn't too shabby either - Tiger Woods would be shook.

▣ ***What advice would you give to young people looking to enter your industry?***

My first piece of advice would be that everyone is pretty much winging it. So, apply for every internship/junior position, even if you don't feel qualified. Our industry values hustlers who work hard and are brave enough to show up and put in the work. Also, bring your authentic self into every space. After all, this is a creative industry – so have fun with it.

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

Freelancer specialising in games and entertainment | My first loves are writing, music and video games

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