

Pernod Ricard's Vika Shipalana on creating 'money can't buy' experiences

 By Jessica Tennant

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As the channel director of Prestige at Pernod Ricard South Africa, Vika Shipalana works in the luxury brand space and her expertise lies in marketing to this select class of individuals. As she was a judge at last year's Standard Bank Top Women Awards and is said to be a 'champion for women empowerment', we thought we'd interview her this Women's Month, not only to find out how she builds lasting connections between high-end brands and consumers, but also how she 'inspires the girl child to thrive'.



Vika Shipalana

■ ***What is it about Pernod Ricard that attracts the luxury or super-premium market?***

There are a few reasons, however I think the one that stands out for me the most, is the way in which we do business. Pernod Ricard has a very unique culture which permeates everything that we do. For us, luxury isn't about 'high-brow' and 'inaccessible' products and experiences. We believe in the spirit of conviviality and authenticity, and therefore, everything that we do is about ensuring that people always feel welcome and valued.

Another key factor is the quality, craftsmanship and heritage of our brands. From our whisky, champagne and cognac portfolio of brands, to our vodka, rum and gin offerings, Pernod Ricard has some of the finest luxury wine (incl. champagne) and spirit brands and products from around the world.

■ ***How do you form emotional/meaningful, long-lasting connections between the brand and its consumers?***

It's about creating long-lasting memories with our target consumers and customers, by delivering 'money can't buy' experiences for them, their friends and family. We want people to fall in love with our brands and if you can get people to experience your brand, in a way that is relevant, authentic, 'effortless' and meaningful to them, then that moment will last in their hearts and minds for a long time.

■ ***What has been your greatest learning to date of this audience/marketing to them?***

Wealthy people are looking for experiences that their money, alone, cannot get them. The questions I've had to ask myself are: What is it that you can offer a person who has everything? That they with all the money in the world, could not do or access for themselves? What knowledge can you share that they would find interesting and meaningful in order to further fuel their interests, passions and/or tastes? Another very important lesson learnt was: wealthy people are wealthy for a reason. Be careful that you do not assume that they will always or automatically buy into an expensive and exclusive product. The product must be relevant to their lifestyle and tailored to suit a specific need.

■ ***What trends are you seeing play out this year and/or do you predict for next year?***

Over and above the 'money can't buy experiences' mentioned above, personalisation and/or customisation is something that we continue to see and will probably be something that we see for years to come. People want to feel valued and treated as the unique individuals that they are. Whether it's in fashion, art, luxury/classic cars, yachts, jets, jewellery, watches and/or luxury wines (incl. champagne) and spirits, people want to be able to add their personal touch to products and experiences, and brands need to be able to cater for that.

■ ***On a more personal level, you're said to be a champion for women empowerment. How so? Why is this important to you?***

I grew up surrounded by a family of strong women and have had the honour and privilege of working with some incredible women over the years. It is through the exposure and learning gained from these interactions and experiences, that I have become the woman that I am today. I believe that a big part of my life's purpose is to take the knowledge and wisdom I've gained over the years and share it with other women. I believe that, in this way, I will be able to make a meaningful impact in the lives of others and they will in turn do the same. If we all did this well, the impact we would make, worldwide, would be tremendous and we would eventually take over and rule the world! For real! LOL

■ ***You believe your role as a woman in leadership is to pave the way for the next generation. How would you say you 'inspire the girl child to thrive'?***

By being a living example, as well as showing and shining a spotlight on other great women in leadership. We show the girl child that it is possible.

■ ***What is your involvement in the Standard Bank Top Women Awards?***

I was honoured and humbled to have been a judge in the 2016 Standard Bank Top Women Awards. I love celebrating great women. It was a great opportunity and privilege.

■ ***In line with the bank's latest campaign, 'what's your next'?***

To challenge and grow the woman I see in the mirror every morning, to believe more in herself and reach even greater heights.

■ ***Is there a female figure that has had a positive influence on your life?***

Quite a few but none like my mother. She was created just for me (sorry Big Bro)! It's incredible how much our mothers can, and do, influence the people we become. She is a wise, smart, humble, beautiful, generous, strong, principled and a "smart-working" woman with the biggest heart! It's a lot. I know. Big shoes to fill.

■ ***Why do you think it's important to have a month dedicated to women in SA?***

I suppose, for me, every day is Women's Day, however, as a country, I do believe that it is important that we have a month dedicated to women, where we can all shine a light in honour and celebration of our women. We face a lot of challenges and obstacles in our daily lives, and yet through it all, we smile, we laugh, we love and we nurture others. It's the least that the country can do.

What is your message this Women's Month?

There is no better time than now! If you have a dream, go for it!

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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