

# Michelle Dobson on her promotion to MD of Lumen



By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Michelle Dobson's recent promotion from business unit director to MD dovetails with digital marketing agency Lumen progressing to the next level.

"A big part of my remit is to grow the business into supporting products and services. We work closely with our clients to understand their business challenges and strategic objectives, and then deploy Lumen's skills in understanding and interpreting data to develop digital marketing strategies to transform their business."

Here, she explains her new role in more detail and what lured her from corporate to the agency environment and digital marketing in particular...

## **Comment on your new role and what it entails.**

It entails a little bit more than my previous role as business unit director, where I looked after client profitability within the business. My new role as managing director now means I am responsible for the entire profit and loss sheet. This encompasses revenue/income from new clients, retaining existing clients, and cross-selling our services. I am also responsible for managing (and reducing) our operational expenditure, while balancing investment in terms of marketing, advertising and sales costs to meet our financial objectives.

At Lumen, we're big on culture and believe in creating a 'lekker' environment with 'lekker' people, in line with our company values of creativity, innovation and 'work hard, play hard'. Creating and maintaining the Lumen culture forms a large part of my responsibilities, as our founder and group CEO Rian Carstens is passionate about this.

The long and the short of it is that the new role means ensuring the agency runs effectively and efficiently, while generating revenue and creating a fun environment for our people.



Michelle Dobson

## **What do you bring to the agency and how do you plan to grow it?**

I don't come from an agency background. I spent 20 years in corporate, gaining experience working for big brands like British Airways, Cell C, Adidas and Red Bull Mobile. This gives me an in-depth understanding as to what client's expectations are of agencies, and how we can deliver in this regard. Given my strong experience in brand marketing specifically, I'm able to combine the art of brand theory with the science of measurable data and analytics, from my team of digital specialists at Lumen, to developing digital marketing strategies with the potential of transforming our clients' businesses.

Lumen has traditionally been a media agency focusing on paid media services such as Google and Facebook Advertising and lead-generation through a network of affiliate partners. We've seen the benefits that executing a well-developed content strategy can have on SEO, and thus organic site rankings in search engine results, as well as in supporting the efforts of our paid media department by leading to higher conversion rates via the 'brand halo effect'.

We see this as a gap in the market, where we can develop and execute content marketing strategies to improve SEO and

conversion rates by focusing on content aligned to performance: not only do we tell brand stories that encourage conversations and engagement, but also maximise your return on investment (ROI). My immediate focus is on sourcing new clients, and expanding our suite of services to include content marketing, social media, and community management.

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

Having just relaunched our [website](#), my next focus is to appoint a community manager to start monetising this area, and to refine our new business processes to actively recruit new clients in our field of expertise.

### ■ **What do you love most about your career?**

Every day is different. As consumers' needs shift, marketing needs to adapt to put the right message in front of the right customer at the right time. People are overwhelmed by stimuli, with some reports stating that the average consumer is exposed to over 10,000 brand messages a day.

Therefore, marketers need to be smart about what they are saying, when and with what channels to ensure relevance.

*“ The right message served at the right time to the wrong customer is as useless as the wrong message served to the right customer at the right time. ”*

It is critical to break through the clutter and add value to customers.

### ■ **Why digital marketing?**

*“ Digital moves really fast, and the internet of a million, billion, trillion things can be a scary, dark place for brands. ”*

I love that digital marketing provides data that we can extract, simplify and interpret for our clients. Within the digital environment, the more you dig, the more you uncover.

Finding creative digital solutions combines marketing theory, specialist digital expertise, A/B testing, and monitoring and measurement to ultimately optimise and increase ROI. It's a state of constant learning. The beauty lies in interpreting the data – the ability to start small and test various things before opening the floodgates.

### ■ **What has been your most noteworthy learning in the space?**

Digital marketing is not rocket science. A minefield, yes, but not rocket science. It is about finding the right people with a shared vision who are inspired by the potential of digital, and who work together to execute digital strategies and campaigns to support our clients' business objectives. Customers' attention is the scarcest resource at present, and a brand's mental availability (the probability of a consumer noticing, recognising, and thinking of your brand in a buying situation) is more important than ever.

Customers are searching online every single day. Google coined the phrase 'Zero Moment of Truth' (Z-MOT) in 2011 already, based on the way in which the internet has changed how we decide what to buy. We can use data to capitalise on this Z-MOT by placing the right message in front of the right customer at that time, and then use expert, specialist digital skills to interpret data, optimise, learn, tweak, and get more bang for our client's buck.

Combine this with a sound digital strategy aligned to the overall marketing objectives, a user-friendly and responsive website designed for maximum conversions, a clear content strategy that driving consumers to that site, and processes and people to support all of this, and the sky is the limit.

### ■ **What industry trends do you predict for 2018?**

I always find digital folks' answers to this question to be quite revealing. Mostly digital marketers talk to hot topics they've heard at the latest digital marketing conference – the merits of having an online chatbot, whether programmatic media-

buying works in South Africa, the rise of the social media influencer.

“ My number one trend prediction is the role the digital marketing agency will play in the client space in the next year or so. ”

I believe marketers have not only cottoned-on to the fact that the digital space is complex and fragmented, and requires guidance from digital experts and specialists in various digital fields, but that very few (if any) agencies possess all of these specialist skills across the entire digital landscape. More and more full-service agencies are starting to strip out their core functions, and rather work with managed partners whom they trust to deliver a full suite of products.

At Lumen, we understand the role of digital and the power of analytics and data, and are able to interrogate all areas of digital to ensure they ultimately work towards enhancing our clients' performance – this includes web development, creative, SEO, UX, etc. We work with a team of experts across all of these areas, overseeing their individual deliverables to ensure all activity is aligned to improving performance and getting results.

#### ■ **What are you currently reading/listening to for work?**

“ I read 'real' books, not the Kindle kind, which might seem taboo for a managing director of a digital agency. ”

I like to alternate 'easy' leisure reading with 'learning' for personal, career and industry growth. I have just finished *The Secret Race: Inside the Hidden World of the Tour de France* by Tyler Hamilton and Daniel Coyle. I look forward to cracking the spine of Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, which looks at gender inequality and why women are still underrepresented in the workforce, how they hold themselves back unintentionally, and how they can fly the flag for women in the workplace. (I am a complete feminist at heart.)

#### ■ **Tell us something else about yourself not generally known.**

I tend to be a 'what you see is what you get' kind of person, but I guess my work persona is very different to my private persona. Those who know me from a work perspective would have trouble believing I can be a free spirit in my downtime. I have an obsession with music, live bands and festivals. I'm a bit of a daredevil (I have two bungee jumps and a 120m free fall SCAD dive under my belt). I discovered a love for sport during my time with Adidas, and over the past four years I've completed the New York Marathon, two Iron Man 70.3 events, two Cape Town Cycle Tours and a 94.7 Cycle Challenge.

## ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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