

"The industry needs to reset, rethink and reposition" - Robyn Campbell

By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Recently appointed Machine_ MD Robyn Campbell tells us everything from how the agency is adapting to the fast-changing consumer and media environment to deliver more valuable, effective and innovative solutions, to where the industry is at on its journey towards transformation and what it was like joining a new agency during lockdown...



Robyn Campbell, Machine_'s newly appointed MD

Managing director Robyn Campbell recently joined Machine_ from HelloFCB+. She has over a decade of experience in the agency world, with a heavy focus on the digital environment. During her tenure at HelloFCB+ she drove digital-first thinking, developing various specialist units including the social media department, digital content production and digital media offerings.

“ My love for digital and firm belief that success comes from supporting and nurturing talent, culture and passion make me believe Machine_ is the perfect home for me. I hope I can bring some of that experience and build on what this great agency has already achieved. ”



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📌 **Congrats on your appointment. How do you feel about it?**

Thank you so much! I have always held Machine_ in such high regard, watching from the sidelines over the years and being impressed by the strong culture, talented people and rich work they have consistently produced. Now that I have the opportunity to be part of the story, I feel very honoured and excited for the ride.

📌 **How and when did this come about/take effect? And comment on the timing given the lockdown/global crisis.**

I decided to make the move across earlier this year, with my new role at Machine_ commencing on 1 May. When I weighed up taking the role, I never thought a global pandemic should be considered in my pro/con list, but I suppose tackling the unexpected is part and parcel of advertising. The timing was difficult, leaving HelloFCB+ was like leaving behind family, and those farewells were made all the tougher by not being in the same office for the last six weeks of my time there.

“ *Joining a new agency during a lockdown has been surreal. Trying to get to know a new team without those smaller interactions like coffee runs, watercooler banter and bar nights has made me have to get more creative on how to get to know them all, master the digital impression, keep my camera on more (even if no one else has theirs on) and learn through trial and error. There’s nothing like a jarring silence on a conference call to let you know you’ve missed the mark.* ”

Although it may feel a bit uncomfortable or challenging at times, the entire world is in a state of flux and we are all adapting together. My focus has been on grabbing the opportunities to adjust our sails and come out of each challenge as a stronger, more future-focused business.

📌 **What does your role entail?**

I oversee the Machine_ agency in both Cape Town and Johannesburg. My role covers all sorts, from managing the agency, building our client relationships, overseeing financials and budgets, driving transformation, planning our brand strategy, and augmenting our agency offerings and how to adapt to our client’s needs. I do this while working very closely with my management team and together we co-author our business strategy and drive the implementation of our initiatives.

📌 **What excites you most about the agency and your role in particular?**

The people. There is a group of hugely talented people at Machine_ that have a raft of experience I can learn from, engage in and collaborate with.



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📌 **Comment on the current state of the industry, how the industry has responded to the crisis and Machine_ in particular, and how you plan to navigate the agency through this.**

“ *The industry as a whole has really surprised me. The speed of adaption to remote working and collaboration has been amazing. I’ve seen a great deal of generosity across the board, the sharing across groups and agencies – that has been really heartening, and I think we are all showing up with a lot more kindness and willingness to adapt. I see adaptability, agility and good, old fashioned creativity as key tenets in shaping our new ways of working. We certainly aren’t going to let this ‘good crisis go to waste’ and are making sure that as we pivot, we are adapting our policies, ways of working* ”

and product to emerge stronger and more capable than before. ”

📌 **What do you love most about your career and the advertising industry?**

That at its best, we get to tackle problems using creativity.



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📌 **Tell us a bit about your experience and how this has equipped you for your new position.**

I've always had a real curiosity around the digital landscape, from studying computer science as a subject at school to specialising in digital design at college, it's been a big part of what makes me tick. From joining a wild, young independent digital agency, Hellocomputer and learning from some of the best talent in the industry, there have been so many experiences that have been fundamental in shaping my career.

“ From pitch wins, client losses, hoisting of shiny trophies in the air, joining global networks, judging award shows, managing talent, speaking at events, driving the transformation agenda and fighting for my people, I've had to navigate some epic highs and manage some dismal lows. ”

Those learnings have shaped my management approach and armed me with grit and resilience. My love for digital and firm belief that success comes from supporting and nurturing talent, culture and passion make me believe Machine_ is the perfect home for me. I hope I can bring some of that experience and build on what this great agency has already achieved.



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📌 **You're passionate about industry transformation and equality, and as head of the IAB Agency Council, you contribute regularly to thought leadership, mentoring and development initiatives to uplift the industry. What does transformation mean to you, where is the industry on its journey towards transformation and what steps do you believe the industry needs to take to achieve or fast-track this?**

“ Transformation is key to this industry thriving or even surviving. Unfortunately, I don't believe the work needed in elevating and amplifying black talent, at all levels, is being championed across our industry. There are pockets of real change, but the truth is we have all been too slow. As an industry, we are still so far from even making a dent, but recently there has been some much-needed momentum towards holding businesses, leaders and brands to a higher account. The industry needs to reset, rethink and reposition. There has never been more conversation or supporting material for leaders to leverage. ”

A good example from *Campaign* asking business leaders to be intentional in their support: [Adland open letter calls for solidarity and action after death of George Floyd](#).

It is up to us to listen and educate ourselves, not wait to be educated. We need to identify where we can make a difference and stand up and act.

📌 **What are you most looking forward to (at Machine_/in your new role)?**

Being exposed to new clients and their businesses. I love learning new things and getting insight into how some of these brands thrive in the South African market.

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

Deploying our revised transformation approach.

🔴 **What are you currently reading/watching/listening to?**

Reading: I am just getting started on *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. I am a big Adichie fan and can highly recommend her work, particularly *We Should All Be Feminists* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Watching: I've been enjoying Netflix's take on previous podcast series I really enjoyed. *Athlete A*, *Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich* and *The Staircase* have been well-produced distractions.

Listening: Sadly, my podcast listening time has been cut down dramatically during Covid. Travelling in cars, planes and trains has always provided me with pockets of time to indulge in podcasts. Being homebound has impacted that, but here are some of my favourites: *This American Life*, *Code Switch*, *No Such Thing As A Fish* and *Hidden Brain*.

🔴 **Tell us something about yourself not generally known?**

I am a very mediocre amateur bird watcher.

Follow Campbell on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) and connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).

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