

EXCLUSIVE: Natasha Maharaj, marketing director at Distell, takes us behind Distell's brand campaigns



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Natasha Maharaj is a commercial brand crafter with global experience in Fortune 500 consumer goods companies. Her career path has taken her from South Africa to Switzerland and Singapore, and exposed her to a range of brands, cultures and markets in Asia, Latin America and Europe. With over 16 years experience in marketing and a demonstrated track record of developing and executing integrated marketing plans end to end, Maharaj is strong at generating profitable growth through innovation and the development of portfolios anchored on consumer preference and segmentation.



Natasha Maharaj, marketing director at Distell

Maharaj shares some exclusive insights into Distell's brand campaigns and more...

■ ***What excites you most about your role as marketing director at Distell?***

At its core, marketing is about understanding and using science and consumer psychology to find creative ways to get consumers to adopt a new idea or behaviour. It really is about selling ideas. What is so exciting is that the industry is dynamic and continuously evolving so one is always learning. It allows you the balance between commercial left-brain thinking and creative right-brain thinking – the perfect blend for me. Most importantly, the role allows me the platform to make a positive difference in all our stakeholder's lives (colleagues, teams, consumers) and create purposeful brands.

■ ***What are some of your most recent brand campaigns and the rationales behind them?***

Amarula - "A Little Something Something"

The enigma of Africa is hard to define. A continent with many significant characteristics and a rich history, offering unique experiences and memories to those lucky enough to set foot on its soil – it is undeniable that there is something very special about Africa. It can be something we feel, smell or taste, in the stories we tell, the human connections we make, the clothes we wear, something we say or something we create.

Amarula Cream Liqueur is a unique offering from South Africa that has traditionally been known as an after-dinner treat reserved for special occasions. But when considering the flavour and taste of Amarula and Africa there is no single occasion or box to put it in. Distell recently launched a new campaign to bring to life and showcase not only the versatility of Amarula but also #ALittleSomethingSomething about Africa.



Source: [YouTube](#)

[Watch the video on YouTube.](#)

We started right at the beginning and challenged ourselves to think about the essence of Africa, what it means to us. When we started to try and explain it to each other it became apparent that there are no simple descriptions to explain Africa to one another. The one thing we could all agree to is that we all feel something when we think of Africa, we all remember something when we think of Africa and we all love something dearly about Africa. At this point we had to agree that #ALittleSomethingSomething will be the only way to describe Africa and to tap into our target audience and to enable them to recall 'something' for themselves.

Savanna - "Savatical"

We introduced our newest Siyavanna (South Africa we get you) campaign – Savatical. We love to connect with local societal norms and to reward their talented originators, and after spending many days and nights we have found and credited the originator of this South African meme to bring Savatical to life: *Rest, Baf'ethu, Rest*. We are in close touch with our audience and understand their need for rest, whether by taking some time out, or just taking the load off in terms of a secured income for three months.

“ All these social media challenges are a lot. You need rest, bafo'. So why not take a Savatical today. Purchase any crisp Savanna Dry, Light, Angry Lemon or Jean, dial *120*1538#, enter your unique undercap code and you could win 3 months' salary. [#SavannaSavatical](#)

Ts & Cs apply. pic.twitter.com/VqjktK9B5T— SavannaCider (@SavannaCider) [March 15, 2021](#) ”

All over social media platforms, South Africans have been talking about the need to just slow down and get the chance to take a break. Experts are all warning against burn out and the importance of taking time out. But, in typical South African style, people have not been offering advice in the form of breathing exercises or the latest spa specials – they have been showcasing their empathy by simply sharing rest's own cultural moment with each other: *Rest, Baf'ethu, Rest*. Savatical by Savanna allows you to win three months' salary to rest after the last hectic year.

Savanna Virtual Comedy Bar

Savanna's insight was that 2020 was a tough year. With a global pandemic, lockdowns and bans, it was easy to take life

too seriously in those tough times. South African consumers were looking for a light-hearted, witty perspective that allowed them to laugh.

The Savanna Virtual Comedy Bar came to life during lockdown Level 5 in order to show its continued support for South African comedians. Covid-19 forced us to think on our feet, find different ways to show our support to the comedy industry, and ways to entertain our fans when they were feeling isolated from family, friends and fun. Savanna continues to aim to uplift a nation through humour, as laughter truly is the best medicine.

Siyavanna South Africa!

A term originally coined by a social media fan has become the basis of the new campaign for the brand. Siyavanna means 'we get each other/we see you'. Known for its crisp and witty perspective, Savanna's communication generally highlights keen observations about the realities and nuances of South African life. South Africans' sense of humour has always been admirable in the sense that they can laugh at themselves and the misperceptions that are bound to pop up in a multicultural society. Humour is their super power!



Savanna Cider highlights the ironies of influencer marketing and invites consumers to also get 'money for nothing' in new promo

Grey Africa 23 Oct 2020



Bernini Glow Getter

The insight behind the Bernini work is that we know that as a woman getting ahead in today's world is tough. It's even tougher when your confidence is undermined and you don't have the necessary support.

Bernini, the natural sparkling grape Frizzantè, launched its intuitive 'Glow up on our way up' campaign, stepping up to support the brand's 'glow-getters' - strong, confident and glamorous young women. Bernini has always been a brand that champions female progress and empowerment, and supports the close connections between women and the support they get from their circle of friends - their squad. Bernini is about women helping women.

The 'Glow up on our way up' campaign launched two platforms over the months of the Covid-19 lockdown. The Bernini Squadcast Series provided a platform for confident strong, empowered young women to openly engage in conversations about serious issues relevant to young women, while the Girls Night In series focused on the glamour that is integral to the glow-getter lifestyle - inviting glow-getters to 'glow up' at home together.

■ ***Tell us about your most successful marketing campaign.***

The digitally-led Savanna Virtual Comedy Bar. It came to life during lockdown Level 5 to show its continued support for the SA comedy industry. During this time, the Savanna Virtual Comedy Bar lived on Savanna's social media channels and due to restrictions, no production or filming could take place. As a result, fans followed a YouTube/Facebook link on Thursday nights to receive their weekly dose of laughter when they needed it most. With a line-up featuring much loved SA comedians, the show didn't disappoint. Consequently, the Savanna Virtual Comedy Bar will now be moving to Comedy Central where it will live for the foreseeable future.

We realised over the first lockdown that no matter what level of lockdown we found ourselves in, there was no ban on serving unrestricted laughter. Covid-19 just forced us to think on our feet, find different ways to show our support to the comedy industry and ways to entertain our fans when they were feeling isolated from family, friends and fun.

■ ***Distell, a global business with roots in South Africa, produces and markets a diverse portfolio of award-winning alcoholic brands. What other sectors impact on your industry?***

- Upstream – SA grape / wine farming, apple juice and glass.
- Downstream – Advertising agencies, including macro and micro influencers.

■ ***With the Covid-19 pandemic, what are the biggest challenges when it comes to marketing?***

Alcohol responsibility messaging. It's key to first state when consumed responsibly, alcohol can form part of a balanced lifestyle. However, maintaining this balance can be challenging for a small group of consumers, leading to health and social

problems. We acknowledge the prevalence of misuse and do work to help solve these challenges.

The industry as a whole promotes responsible drinking and harm reduction through the [Association for Alcohol Responsibility and Education \(Aware\)](#) as well as brand lead initiatives.

We are working hard to educate especially at-risk groups about the dangers of binge drinking, drinking and driving, underage drinking and to develop a responsible drinking culture.

■ ***In your opinion, what do you think are the most successful channels for getting your brand message out there?***

Omnichannel approach – digital marketing which is targeted, e.g. social media, web and email marketing combined with traditional channels of communication which is still important in SA. Television and radio are still reach media and not as fragmented yet in SA as some other markets.

■ ***When it comes to marketing efforts, what can brands no longer ignore?***

Purpose-led marketing, which has been accelerated as a result of Covid, is a buzzword amongst marketers today. A brand is said to be purpose-led when it puts its core values at the heart of everything it does. Purpose-led brands lead beyond just the bottom line. It is focused around shared value and its consumer need, and champions a particular cause, mission, purpose or vision at its centre (e.g. Savanna Virtual Comedy Bar bringing comic relief to a nation during lockdown). Brands these days should be leading social change to some degree, finding a social cause that resonates with its target consumers.

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