Nicola Cooper - The ever-shifting African business landscape

By Emily Stander

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In her BizTrends2022 session, Nicola Cooper, founder of Nicola Cooper and Associates, academic and analyst, teacher, speaker and brand consultant. With a well-known presence in Africa's fashion and lifestyle landscapes, Cooper has her gaze set on ever-shifting futures, charting trends and behaviour on the hyperlocal and international scale

Speaking at the virtual conference, scheduled to take place on 2 February 2022, Cooper will share how business is changing in dynamic and how businesses can adopt new methods and practices at BizTrends 02.02.2022

What constitutes a trend for you?

A trend is a shift, a movement driven by key technological, socio-political, environmental and economic influence - and how those shifts, either subtle or exaggerated, impacts your business, consumers or industry.

Can you share a bit about what audiences can expect from your presentation?

We hope to show our audiences that business is changing in dynamic - in exciting ways - and how they can adopt new methods of practices that open critical change and opportunity.

You are the founder of Nicola Cooper and Associates - what was the inspiration behind starting this company?

The inspiration behind NC+A was that there was no fundamental groundwork and unearthing of critical business intelligence for Africa’s fashion, lifestyle, and pop/youth cultural landscape.

Trends or cultural information was often defined from the outside looking in rather than ground-level information. We wanted to offer clients critical and appropriate information for African businesses rather than the global, Americanised, Eurocentric or Auto-Exotic gaze.

We believe it is vital to humanise data, provide accurate and valuable insights to ensure our clients can make informed decisions to drive growth, sales and the bottom line.

What value lies in spotting trends in the fashion lifestyle landscape?

As someone who has specialised in identity formation within African cultures, including sub and counter cultures, I was aware of the diversity within the African continent and the importance of identifying the 'golden thread' that connects our consumers and communities.

Once we can explore these narratives, we can empower brands, businesses, or creatives to own their narratives and impact the local and the global market.

We must assist our clients in understanding their value, their point of differentiation and how that can be used to cut through the noise to bring a new, fresh spin to their market.

Meet the speakers for BizTrends 02.02.2022 - Booking opens
Bizcommunity 2 Nov 2021

Why do you think nurturing the youth of Africa is a valuable thing to invest in?

Our continent is the youngest on the planet; when we gauge the median age of other countries, we begin to understand how young we are.

Africa has been defined from outside of its borders for far too long. It is thrilling to observe Africans taking that power back and slowly beginning to understand that it is their story to tell, and they get to define what African is to the world.

Seeing African brands, businesses, and professionals step into their power is goosebumps material in a continent with a tumultuous past.

How has the narrative changed in this landscape from when you started until now?

Obviously, as trend analysts, futurists and strategists, we have seen this coming for a long time; it has been interesting to experience the shift with our clients and how seeing our predictions come into fruition allows for trust and the opportunity to be innovative and to make tremendous change within our industries.

Many game changers have been laying the groundwork, and it is always fulfilling to see the growth of seeds planted.

Could you share any key lessons you have learned along the way?

It is not a lesson but more an observation along NC+A's path. Patience and trust are critical in our role, change is never easy with large corporations, and our services are new.

It is imperative to understand a client’s business in its present and the company's aspirations and know that it is not a one size fits all.

Our role is to arm our clients with vital insights and business intelligence to ensure that they can grow. That we are in business to make money, not all trends apply to every business. Our role is to deliver information that is not just ‘cool’ but valuable business tools to help companies reach their full potential and shift with the zeitgeist.

What is your least favourite social media platform?

My least favourite social media platform is Instagram. The shift from a personal space to express your thoughts and our identity to an overtly curated and monetised platform has removed a sense of differentiation and drew what I love about the diversity of our world.

The sameness and overly polished approach have left the platform with many beautiful advertisements but little substance, which removes the layers and depth of what makes people individual and unique.

Bring me Twitter any day!

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

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

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- #BehindtheSelfie: Millicent Maroga, corporate affairs director at Heineken SA - 18 Jan 2023
- #BehindtheSelfie: Nathalie Schooling, founder of Nighten - 14 Dec 2022
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