

Thobile Tshabalala, head of Brand at Old Mutual

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Thobile Tshabalala

Old Mutual recently launched a new campaign called #Sisonke, to help changemakers make a greater difference in their community. The campaign seeks to create awareness and inspire collective action to mitigate, minimise and manage

Covid-19 and its effects. The insurer is also supporting governments efforts to drive education on Covid-19 safety protocols and vaccine messages across mass media channels.

“Covid-19 has caused significant devastation across the world, and according to experts the virus could be with us for some time. If we do not remain active, educated, and motivated to beat the virus, complacency could set in. This could lead to an unnecessary spike in infections, sickness and deaths, leaving the virus to remain a real threat to people across the continent. As a responsible business, we want to ensure that we support community-level initiatives that show dedication and commitment to fighting the spread of this virus,” says Tshabalala.

Here, she tells us about her career and work with financial services brands and more about how the insurer is lending a helping hand as a corporate business to make sure that there is some level of sustainability for such initiatives...

■ ***Thobile, as head of Brand at Old Mutual, tell us more about your role and what it entails exactly?***

My role is to implement the overall brand strategies and marketing-related plans to build and grow the Old Mutual brand, ultimately leading to increased awareness and relevance for Old Mutual Limited. The role also includes promoting the Old Mutual brand through strategic key messages and using relevant media for various target audiences.

■ ***Growing up, what did you want to be?***

I initially wanted to be the Reserve Bank Governor – Tito Mboweni was such an inspiration to me, but there was a different plan for my life.

■ ***Tell us about your career: what you studied and why, and how you ended up where you are today?***

I majored in economics and industrial psychology, with the plan to become an economist and ultimately Reserve Bank Governor. Given the loss of my car, I could not progress with my honours studies in economics. And at that time, there was an opportunity in pursuing marketing, of which I took advantage. Over the years, I have worked on various brands in the financial services sector and that ultimately lead me to where I am today in my career.

■ ***What do you enjoy most about marketing and working in the insurance space specifically?***

I love the fast pace, variety and role that marketing plays in an organisation. My first job was with a bank and, from there, I grew in the financial services sector. I particularly enjoy marketing insurance - the impact that our products provide, how they drive customer future goals and ultimately drive the economic value.

■ ***Tell us more about your experience and specifically with regard to brands.***

I have worked on many Financial Services brands, in various capacities to sell a product like credit cards, to positioning a brand as a responsible corporate citizen. I have also rebranded the Mutual & Federal brand to Old Mutual Insure, an opportunity that happens very rarely for marketers.

■ ***Any career highlights you'd like to share.***

I have so many career highlights, and it is very difficult for me to single out one as they all have made such a big impact on my career.

■ ***If you were mentoring a future you, what career advice would you give to aspiring young marketing and branding professionals?***

I would emphasise the importance of understanding the real engine of the business, how it makes money, key drivers and customer profile. There is increasing pressure on marketers to demonstrate real value to the business – linking the marketing strategy to real business outcomes.

■ ***How has the pandemic and subsequent national lockdowns affected your work and Old Mutual specifically?***

When the pandemic and national lockdowns hit, it was evident that we (as Old Mutual) needed to go back to the drawing board with the way we were going to continue operating. We have certainly felt the impact of Covid-19 on many fronts as a business, on employees, our customers, and our operations. From a marketing perspective, we have had to be very mindful of the prevailing tone and adjust our initiatives accordingly. We have re-imagined some of our sponsorships, to be relevant in the Covid environment and demonstrate our support to our customers through various relief programmes, including the R4bn cover we provided to frontline workers.

■ ***As a responsible business, you want to ensure that you support community-level initiatives that show dedication and commitment to fighting the spread of Covid-19. So Old Mutual will also consider some of these initiatives for long-term support. Why did you decide to take this a step further, and how so?***

We understand that we cannot be a thriving business if our society is not thriving. Therefore, our efforts are about mutual value. Our efforts to consider supporting some of these initiatives are long-term. The financial impact that Covid-19 had on businesses and I can only imagine its effects on small businesses. This is our way of lending a helping hand where we can as a corporate business to make sure that there is some level of sustainability for these initiatives.

■ ***The insurer is also supporting government efforts to drive education on Covid-19 safety protocols and vaccine messages across mass media channels. Tell us more about this aspect.***

Our involvement is in line with our purpose of championing mutually positive futures, for all stakeholders – everyday. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and its rapid spread across Africa and the world cannot be ignored because it poses a major threat to communities and their livelihoods. The scale and impact of this pandemic could not go unanswered, especially because Old Mutual has an extensive footprint across the continent. It's our duty to get involved and, through co-operating with the public and private sectors, do our best to help reduce the threat we are all facing. The education drive on Covid-19 safety protocols and vaccine messages across mass media channels help make sure that these acts of safety are always instilled in the minds of the society making it easier to stay safe.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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