

Out of the mouths of interns

Issued by [Boomtown](#)

19 Jul 2023

South Africa's advertising agencies recognise that skills development is crucial for success in the marketing communication sector. Many have been running internship programmes for a decade, some for longer, to guide and mentor youngsters set on entering the industry.



Top: Boomtown JHB from left Norma Mhlana, Lindelani Dlamini and Sinakho Manxwa | Bottom left: Boomtown JHB, Pontsho Lintoor, centre: Boomtown PE, Saskia Smith and Anelisa Maneli and right: Boomtown JHB, Zibusiso Dube.

Boomtown's Bayeza internship programme is different from most. Unlike traditional internships which tend to be organised along the lines of job shadowing, Bayeza offers interns a hands-on and immersive experience – and it pays more than the usual stipend.

Bayeza started in 2014 and has helped 35 young go-getters start their careers with a bang since then. Interns are entrusted with real projects and are encouraged to contribute their ideas and insights, gaining valuable exposure to various aspects of the advertising industry. This hands-on approach not only strengthens their practical skills but also boosts their confidence, preparing them for the challenges that lie ahead.

We asked the seven interns doing their 12-month stints during the 2023/2024 financial year to tell us what they have learnt so far at Boomtown.

Boomtown Johannesburg, marketing research intern: Pontsho Lintoor

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in your few months in the industry?

As an intern conducting marketing research for Boomtown, working on iconic South African heritage brands, the biggest lesson I have learned in my six months in the industry is the importance of understanding and respecting the cultural nuances and values associated with these brands.

In the realm of marketing, especially when dealing with heritage brands that have deep roots in a specific culture or community, it is crucial to recognise and appreciate the historical and cultural significance they hold. These brands are not just products or services; they are symbols of tradition, pride, and identity for many people.

By immersing myself in the rich history and cultural context of these brands, I have realised the significance of conducting thorough research to fully comprehend their heritage. This involves learning about their origins, key milestones, and the stories behind their success. It also requires understanding the target audience's values, beliefs, and aspirations, as well as the social and historical factors that shape their perceptions.

By prioritising cultural authenticity, we can create campaigns that not only promote these brands but also contribute to preserving and celebrating the rich cultural heritage of South Africa. This approach builds trust, fosters long-term relationships with customers, and ultimately drives the success of these iconic brands.

What do you know now that you wish you had known before you studied advertising?

Looking back on my journey studying advertising, there are a few things I wish I had known before diving into this field.

While advertising is about creativity and communication, understanding consumer behaviour is equally important. Knowing how consumers think, what motivates their actions, and how they make purchasing decisions can significantly impact the effectiveness of advertising campaigns. I wish I had recognised the value of consumer psychology and behaviour earlier on, as it forms the foundation for creating compelling and targeted campaigns.

The advertising industry is fast-paced, competitive, and subject to constant change. Being adaptable and resilient in the face of challenges, setbacks, and evolving client demands is vital. I wish I had known the importance of cultivating these qualities from the beginning, as they are critical for maintaining motivation, overcoming obstacles, and thriving in this dynamic industry.

Boomtown Johannesburg, graphic design intern: Noma Mhlanga

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in your few months in the industry?

I have learnt the importance of working with my team members and not against them. In the beginning, this was particularly difficult for me as I tend to be extremely competitive. I have really learnt to appreciate the opinions and suggestions of others, as they lead to more diverse and better quality work.

What do you know now that you wish you had known before you studied advertising?

That good campaigns do not always need to be complex and visually overloaded, but rather the more simplified ideas are usually more thought-provoking and impactful.

Boomtown Johannesburg, art director/designer intern: Lindelani Dlamini

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in your few months in the industry?

The biggest lesson I have learnt over the last few months is the ability to let go. Being a perfectionist, I always tend to want

to get a project as close as possible to 'that's it', but this often hampers my team's progress. By letting go, I allow myself to work cohesively in a team, and allow space for more ideas (that I would probably not have seen had I worked on a project in isolation and trying to get it perfect).

What do you know now that you wish you had known before you studied advertising?

I wish I had known how quickly time flies when you are in the industry! Briefs feel like they are coming on hot on the heels of others, and there are not enough hours in the day to address them all – but here we are doing them!

Boomtown Johannesburg, digital and social media intern: Zibusiso Dube

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in your six months in the industry?

Over the past months, I have learnt that it is important to have knowledge about and skills in every aspect of the marketing industry. This will enable me to fit in, to be employable and to be an asset within a business. Without disregarding the importance of being a 'specialist', it will work in my favour to have basic knowledge about everything.

What do you know now that you wish you had known before you studied advertising?

Before I studied advertising, I did not know how to prepare a content plan and write copy. But, with the help of my colleagues, I have been able to sharpen my skills and get better at it.

Boomtown Johannesburg, copywriting intern: Sinako Manxiwa

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in your four months in the industry?

'Coming out of my shell' has been a challenge for me, because of just how outspoken most other people are. That, and learning to work under pressure! I tend to get overwhelmed by the strain of coming up with solutions. As someone who prides herself on her writing, I will say that I have doubled down on forcing myself to write effectively because of the various tones of voice of the brands I've worked with.

What do you know now that you wish you had known before you studied advertising?

Coming up with ideas and concepts is not child's play, neither is following through with the work. I also never knew I would have to be more vocal, to learn to speak 'in upper case'. To be honest, I did not expect to be in this industry – my goal was to be active in media as a journalist, but I opted to explore advertising. I wish those lecturers had focused on the practicality of creating ideas, rather than the theoretical ... because most of the time I am required to apply knowledge. I am still open to learning more about this industry. However, the will to go venture elsewhere will always be within me. To be honest, I did not expect to be here – my goal was to be active in media as a journalist – but here I am.

Boomtown Port Elizabeth, copywriting intern: Saskia Smith

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in your few months in the industry?

Transitioning from university to the professional world can be daunting, especially in our industry. As a newcomer, you are expected to collaborate with highly experienced and accomplished creatives and share your thoughts and ideas. At first, I struggled with creative blocks and hesitated to pitch new ideas with regards to concepting campaigns. However, I quickly realised that every single idea is valuable, regardless of size or scale. Even small contributions can lead to new, groundbreaking concepts among the team. Since beginning to voice my ideas, I have seen many of them come to life in our campaigns. Moreover, I have learned that it's okay if not every idea is used; the important thing is to communicate openly and trust the process. In the end, it's far better to take the risk and discover what works rather than regretting never having tried.

What do you know now that you wish you had known before you studied advertising?

During my studies, I was uncertain if I had made the right choice. This feeling was amplified in my first year, leading me to consider changing courses. Looking back, I am grateful that I persevered and completed my degree as it has led me to a fulfilling career. If only I could have told myself then that this was the path for me. Many people dread the end of the weekend and returning to work, but I believe this is because they are not doing what they truly love. While my career is just beginning, I am convinced that continuing to pursue my passion will ensure lifelong contentment with my choices.

Boomtown Port Elizabeth, account executive intern: Anelisa Maneli

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in your few months in the industry?

I have learnt how an agency functions! How to write various types of briefs, how to create a job bag and assign tasks (for Hogan Lovells Global), how to handle daily meetings as well as absorbing the process of how things work (working on Ricoffy with Jade Redcliffe). So far, it has been a good experience, meeting deadlines and staying punctual.



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According to Boomtown's Sinethemba Mashibini, who looked after the agency's human resources and the Bayeza Internship Programme from Port Elizabeth before moving to Johannesburg, it serves as a key that unlocks doors of opportunity for young graduates aspiring to make their mark in the advertising industry.

Now upcountry with greater overall management responsibilities, including ensuring the Boomtown DNA thrives, Mashibini said the agency strongly believes in investing in the next generation of talent.

"Through Bayeza, we provide a supportive and nurturing environment where young interns can grow both personally and professionally," he said. "Bayeza not only provides interns with the opportunity to work on exciting projects but also facilitates networking and relationship-building within the advertising industry. Interns are encouraged to attend industry events, engage with clients, and collaborate with seasoned professionals. This exposure helps interns expand their professional network, opening doors to potential job opportunities and long-term career connections."

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