

Suhana Gordhan, newly appointed ECD at Duke

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Following the recent announcement of Suhana Gordhan's new appointment as ECD at the Duke Group and in light of Women's Month, we interviewed her to find out how this came about, and how she plans to lead the agency creatively and help change the narrative of the local advertising landscape representing an imbalanced gender dynamic where 45% of the workplace is female and only 3% of directorship is held by women.



Suhana Gordhan is Duke Group's new ECD.

Moving from FCB Joburg, Gordhan tells us that it was time for her get out of her comfort zone and change course. "I have a lot to gain from joining the Duke Group, and I hope to learn and grow in a different direction to what I'm familiar with. I look forward to sharing my passion for ideas that really live in people's lives, my specific and utter joy for copywriting and my ability to nurture young talent."

Wayne Naidoo, CEO of the Duke Group adds: "Suhana brings with her deep industry insights that will inform our creative campaigns, as well as a fresh perspective. Her love for nurturing talent mirrors the values that the Duke Group holds, and we are excited to be welcoming her to new and exciting opportunities in Cape Town." Gordhan takes over from Mike Beukes, who is relocating to London.

 ***Congrats on your new executive creative directorship role at the Duke Group! How do you feel about it?***

Thank you Bizcommunity!

“ I have that Coco Chanel feeling, “A woman who cuts her hair, is about to change her life.” Sans the hair cutting, it does feel like a complete reboot. It’s a Liquorice Allsorts of emotions right now because I’m leaving my professional home, FCB, after five years and leaving Johannesburg which has really captured my heart for the last 20 years or so. ”

The move to Duke feels so right for me. I like the energy of the people, the values of Wayne and Nino [Nino Naidoo, director at Duke] and the work Duke is doing. It’s a cliché to use the words, ‘I’m excited’ but I really am because I was looking to awaken some parts of me that felt dozy and in need of a revival. And I think I’ve found it.

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

I’m not someone who makes big decisions quickly. Wayne Naidoo can attest to that! Of course, the national lockdown allowed all of us to reassess and take stock. But my inner voices were restless before that and I ended 2019 with the knowledge that the time for change had come. Part of the reason I admire Wayne is because of his optimism; he seems unstoppable and a global pandemic was not about to stand in the way of his vision for Duke.

“ We are beyond proud to announce the appointment of the Duke Group’s new ECD, [@SuhanaGordhan](#), as of 1 September!

Powerful, exciting times ahead.

Read more on [@MarkLives](#): <https://t.co/4jeAxqtsSj> pic.twitter.com/BAmwup7REm — DUKE. (@dukeadvertising) [August 4, 2020](#) ”

Both my brother and my brother-in-law have had conversations with me about looking at your life in five-year increments and making decisions for the long ride, not just for the ‘now’. FCB has been an incredible, unforgettable journey for me. I was well looked after, lucky to have the opportunity to lead two big accounts and grateful to be surrounded by very smart, invested people that I could learn from. I grew so much at FCB and really started to see what my purpose could be beyond just the work. But personally, I knew I needed change because over the years, change was something I became afraid of, and that is unlike me. It was time for me to shift out of comfort and grow in new directions.



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■ **What does the role entail?**

It will involve leading the agency creatively, to help continue to build on the upward trajectory Duke is on, as well as its respected reputation. I will also be expected to help to grow the business, develop and nurture the teams and sit on the Executive Committee.

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

Duke has that maverick feel about it. I like that the leadership embraces a challenger mentality and the energy and passion is palpable. The new role will offer me a wide scope for learning and growth, healthy challenges, and the chance to really bring my own voice, vision and brand of leadership to the creative department.

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

It is not the first time that our industry has been rocked by a financial crisis, and the challenges of a new breed of marketers that are not as trusting and as embracing of true creativity. I think that creatives are, by nature, resilient and adaptive and we will continue to find innovative ways of making, doing and giving life and love to our brands. Our job as creatives is to do what we do; it's to focus on, as Net#work BBDO says it, 'The Work The Work The Work'.

“ We can glance at the clients' diminishing budgets and be conscious of the bottom line and its precarious movements, but we have to keep fuelling our creative energy and taking what is strange and absurd about the world right and turning it into power, beauty and value. ”

The industry is best served by people who unashamedly fight for creative - no matter what, believe wholeheartedly in its might - no matter what, and continue to make the kind of work that has held South Africa in such good stead on the global stages.

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

I love that I get to make a living out of creativity. I love that my work brings me the most unusual and memorable experiences like seeing Will Smith in the South of France, learning to surf in Nicaragua, dressing like a ninja for some late-night graffiti, learning everything there is to know about chicken even though I'm vegetarian, writing words for Madiba and nurturing young creatives. I love that you get to widen your knowledge on a vast range of subjects from cars and soda to cleaning products and healthcare. And most of all, I love that creative thinking leads to making and making is where your creativity gets to live in the real world.



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

I've spent 16 years in the industry and I've worked on some of the country's most iconic brands in amazing agencies like Ogilvy, King James, Black River FC, VML, Net#work BBDO and of course, FCB. Before I was promoted to ECD in late 2019, I spent 10 years being a creative director. I've judged at local and international awards shows and was the former 'Chair Auntie' of The Loeries. I believe that in my time in the industry I have gathered knowledge and lessons from all the giants I've had the pleasure of working with. I've learnt how to shape, package and sell creative work and how to nurture young talent. I come to Duke with all this history but also with fresh pages in my book of experiences to learn new things and grow myself further.

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

Get through packing boxes, without getting distracted by sentimental artefacts from my life like old love letters, random objects and photos, and trying very hard not to procrastinate.

■ What are you currently reading/watching/listening to?

- *Reading:* *Becoming* by Michelle Obama.
- *Watching:* *The Sopranos*
- *Listening to:* Guided Meditations and Wim Hof, because I sure need the serenity.

■ Tell us something about yourself not generally known?

I once left advertising to become a professional dancer.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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