

# House of Brave announces major empowerment deal, appoints Karabo Songo, Musa Kalenga

Yesterday saw 100% black-owned investment firm FastGro Investment Holdings acquire a 25.1% share of independent agency House of Brave (HOB) and the appointment of new group CEO Karabo Songo and chief future officer Musa Kalenga.

Songo has taken the reins of the business to focus on empowerment at a time when the agency is rapidly expanding. These developments also take place against the backdrop of the crucial transformation legislation currently facing the South African advertising industry, culminating in the Mac Charter which takes effect in April 2018.

## A clearly defined seat at the table

“Many of these transactions have been handled in the incorrect manner in the past but having been approached by a number of parties over the years, I decided to invest in HOB because I will be part of the core direction and operations of the company both as a board member and group CEO, with a clearly defined seat at the decision-making table.” In line with this pervasive approach, Songo reveals that HOB will be making a number of key appointments of executive black talent including the announcement of a senior Chairman for the group in the weeks to come.

Songo’s ability to hone in on these key aspects of the deal stems from the fact that he is no stranger to the inner and often fraught workings of the advertising industry, having sat on the board of the Association for Communication and Advertising (ACA) for many years while his keen interest in successful business is shown through his current position as Chairman of the Commonwealth Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs (CAYE) SADC amongst others. He also describes himself as a ‘a serial marketing entrepreneur’ with business interests that focus on the advertising and marketing industry having founded the Olive Communications Group in 2009.

## Exponential growth

A key area for Songo will be the area of growing value for talent and client which has long been a passion of his. “For too long, HOB has flown largely under the radar in South African advertising circles despite having grown exponentially in the six years since its launch. Today it’s a R150-million a year business with 73 staff, yet incredibly, many people still view it as a startup!”



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A big focus will therefore be stamping the authority of HOB on the market through true innovation, shared values and execution leading to profit with purpose. “An agency’s credentials are generally judged by its largest clients, it’s all about challenging ourselves. It’s important to understand though, that we define a ‘large’ account not only in terms of revenue but also the creative authority it gives the agency and the understanding of diversity it will bring to HOB within the South African context,” adds Songo.

Another exciting aspect of the agency's growth plans for 2018 is its transformation into a 'hybrid', which has strong elements of a full communications agency with management consulting capability for core business solutions. HOB has already been offering solutions in this manner for a few years now. "We are currently engaging with a number of management consultants on how best to work with them in a manner that is going to make the most sense for the business, staff and most importantly clients.

"The benefits of this type of partnership are threefold, namely meeting the need for clients to consolidate their businesses, allowing management consultancies to be more creative in their approach and for agencies to directly contribute to their clients' ROI. This is an approach that HOB has already championed with a number of clients, resulting in a direct contribution by the agency to their business bottom line and more lucrative work opportunities for staff."

## Words into action

Delving deeper into the exact reasons he finds the HOB story so compelling, Songo elaborates that it is the narrative around being brave and bold and the fact that this has huge potential to solidify the agency's presence in the market.

"This will involve looking at the brave things that the staff do every day and how they live the culture and make our clients' experience their number one priority. This may sound like a nice to have, but it's actually vital from a business perspective, given that the agency is growing at such a fast rate and tackling a much larger market share, which means now more than ever it is key to keep the brave culture alive while also looking at ways we can grow it."



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