

Bringing more women into the outdoor arena

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Tractor Outdoor's sales director Lizelle Mc Connell weighs in on what needs to be done to make the out of home media industry more inclusive to women

Across the global landscape, the out of home (OOH) arena has typically been an industry that has seen more men enter its ranks than women – but things are starting to change.

And this change is desperately needed, says Lizelle Mc Connell, sales director at outdoor media owner Tractor Outdoor – but she also doesn't necessarily believe that in modern times, this disparity is solely as a result of male figures within the industry excluding their female counterparts.

"I believe it's more a lingering knock-on effect of how our industry has developed over time, and by that same token, we as an industry, need to commit to changing this paradigm, and widening the representation at our table."

McConnell believes that outdoor is not the same industry it was two decades ago. "We need to provide more flexibility for women, so that they don't have to choose between a career or a home life. We need to reassess the maternity benefits we offer, so women have the same opportunities as men, and do not suffer a career setback when choosing to start a family.

"We're inviting the industry to acknowledge that women are generally the primary caregivers of their families, and we need employers to come on board and find creative solutions to empower women to still move forward in their careers."

Mc Connell admits that this is not a problem unique to South Africa; it is very much a global issue. "We are starting to see some positive movement across the waters, with the Out of Home Advertising Association of America (OAAA), recently announcing a joint diversity, equity and inclusion initiative in partnership with Geopath, 'OOH United', which aims to advance a culture of inclusion throughout the outdoor arena."

This is encouraging, and the timing is opportune, says Mc Connell. Not only has the medium and technology evolved, the landscape is also changing along with it. "The realm of media buying has progressed and today, is far more layered. We are no longer simply selling billboards; the recent advancements in the arena have led to an increasing emphasis and focus on data-driven intelligence: "rather than relying simply on a gentleman's handshake on a golf course – a remnant of the outdoor old boy's club," she says.

Mc Connell believes that the industry needs to be doing more to attract women – especially women of colour. "We need to do better at showcasing the industry and what it has to offer, and make it more welcoming to more people. There is also a need for mentorship among young female cohorts, and women and men in more senior leadership positions should do everything in their power to help someone else get a foot in the door."



Lizelle Mc Connell



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Mc Connell urges the OOH industry to recognise their responsibility to transform the face of outdoor. "Having more voices will only strengthen us as an industry, and should be actively and intentionally pursued."

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