

Eastern Cape entrepreneur on quest to dominate the out-of-home ad space

It's no question in the world we inhabit today, that content is king just about everywhere you go. Upon a drive in the city of East London, or a long road-trip down the scenic coast of Gqeberha, your eyes are bound to spot some nifty creative on a billboard, an impressive digital LED screen or the latest brand campaign wrapped across the local busses transporting commuters across the province daily. This is likely the work of Bona Phandle Media, a proudly black-owned out-of-home (OOH) media advertising company in the Eastern Cape region.

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It all started out from modest beginnings, with one man's desire to be a part of the hustle of the media and communication industry in South Africa. "Bona Phandle Media was conceptualized back in 2014 in my one-bedroom flat. I was working full time in a marketing job, but I needed something else that would really challenge me and allow me to look after both myself and my family comfortably in the future." says Kanya Nqelanga, founder of Bona Phandle Media.



Kanya Nqelanga, founder of Bona Phandle Media

Nqelanga was born and raised in Mdantsane, one of the largest townships in the Eastern Cape, in a home packed with people, the love of family and ideas. Reflecting on his upbringing, and schooling in a model-c institution, Kanya counts the juxtaposition of environments he was exposed to as a privilege in providing him with a holistic view on the world. "I appreciate my childhood and the way I grew up. I knew what it was like to not have, and I also knew what having things looked like.

Travelling between the two realities on a day-to-day basis prepared me in a way. Today, I'm comfortable in conversations a boardroom and a shebeen," shares Nqelanga.

The nature of the outdoor ad industry

The out-of-home industry has been a growing space for advertising in South Africa where property location is king. The advent of digital media has created space for new players such as Bona Phandle Media, to enter and grow in the market. "Starting out, the intention was to break into the digital billboard space. We saw billboards as property, but we quickly realized we had to kick-off a little bit lighter first and focused on smaller frames and statics as a strategic move to secure long-term lease agreements with clients," explains Nqelanga.

While peering out of the window watching a packed minibus pass by, a thought appeared to dawn on Kanya as he muttered with a smile: "Taxis. We decided it would be branded taxis next for us." It was then that the Bona Phandle team set out to enter the minibus taxi industry and later, the bus arena too.

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– Kanya Nqelanga

With a plan already in place and the groundwork mostly done, Nqelanga began knocking on the doors of local bus associations and after lobbying for about two years, eventually secured a long-term contract giving Bona Phandle Media s rights to branding 90 buses. "That was when things really changed for Bona Phandle," comments Nqelanga.

In no time ninety turned into a second client, giving Bona Phandle access to branding another 150 buses and the team we at a prime position to brand themselves as the biggest black-owned bus advertising media owner in the Eastern Cape. "It's title we hold close to our chest, but we know that already we have to start thinking ahead to what's next and that is migratin towards the digital side of things," explains Nqelanga.





The road to the top is strewn with lessons and a little help along the way

There is something to be said for entrepreneurs starting from the bottom and allowing the growth and learning process to unfold organically. “Starting out in traditional media thickened our skin. It helped us get accustomed with the value chain and understand the processes and industry formats that appeal to clients,” says Nqelanga.

Contrary to the big screen billboards on the highway or side of the road that make up the bulk of activities in the out-of-home ad space, Nqelanga has now shifted focus to placements with higher-dwelling time like local spaza shops, doctors’ rooms, pubs, and salons where the opportunity exists to grow a wider network.

As a beneficiary of the Innovator Trust’s Enterprise Development incubation programme, Bona Phandle Media were able to procure more business equipment, accelerating the growth of their reach and capacity in the region. “Every SMME is going to tell you they need funding assistance which certainly did help us in a big way. Covid was a bad time, it took its toll on many entrepreneurs. When we had zero income, there was nothing small about the relief funding from the Innovator Trust made a big difference for our business. SMMEs that survived the last two years are going to be stronger for it. We’ve got more staying power now, more grit... we’ve got more fight.” remarks Nqelanga.

The Bona Phandle team are confident that they know they have exactly what it will take to make the lofty jump from out-of-home to being one of the top players in the digital ad-space soon. “The training and assistance we received from the Innovator Trust continues to provide us with tangible value. We are at a point where we’ve got access to the market and all we need is to run our proof of concept to digital, in both East London and Gqeberha, and they’re helping us to make that happen,” comments Nqelanga.

To find out more about Bona Phandle Media, their journey and services available, visit their company website: www.bonamedia.co.za.

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