

CANSA, spreading a message of hope

 By [Cindy Peters](#)

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With an 85-year history, the [Cancer Association of South Africa \(CANSA\)](#) brand is firmly entrenched in South African society. The non-profit's mission entails leading in research, education and support in the fight against cancer - not an easy task given the [prevalence of cancer](#) and the disease's indiscriminate nature.



Lucy Balona, head of marketing and communication, CANSA

Making sure the CANSA message is spread far and wide is the organisation's Lucy Balona, head of marketing and communication. Balona joined CANSA in 2005 and, in addition to her current role of managing media and overall strategic communication, she has managed national projects, cause-related programmes and corporate funding on a national level.

We interviewed Balona to find out more about the brand's personality, what she loves most about working with CANSA, and about her recent cycling expedition from Johannesburg to Cape Town.

Could you describe for us the CANSA brand's personality?

We're seen mostly as a caring brand and one that represents trust. This is gratifying because being trustworthy is linked to having good governance. CANSA is also the go-to place for credible information on all cancers with most info being presented in a colourful, positive and user-friendly manner.

CANSA is proactive in reducing general cancer risk through its health awareness campaigns. We're one of the only cancer non-profit organisations that do research on cancer risk reduction.

CANSA is also viewed as fun, allowing active volunteer participation in its national projects. We've been acclaimed for our innovative fundraising campaigns as well as for our digital environment online. It's about effective and consistent engagement that has resulted in us being seen as a winning organisation having won numerous [national awards](#).

We are still also a little on the conservative side, being careful to take measured risks because we deal with a disease that evokes such an emotional response. CANSA has built its reputation and name over 85 years, adapting and evolving when necessary. We give survivors, caregivers and those affected by cancer a sense of belonging through solidarity, support

and care. It's about being given a platform to spread their message of hope, linked to CANSA's programmes and projects.

■ ***What do you love most about working with the CANSA brand?***

The brand allows me to connect and meet with a wide array of people and companies. Our approach is to provide a wealth of knowledge for the ordinary South African trying to cope with cancer themselves or assisting loved ones. Each week can present incredible opportunities to meet heroes – cancer patients and survivors who give so much back to the cause. We also engage constantly with volunteers that are attracted to our brand. I learn so much from volunteers just as they learn from us.

CANSA has provided me with many opportunities for learning and growth – I've had to deal with positive and negative challenges which have taught me valuable insights such as risk management. This brand can give many people the chance to use their talents, passions and abilities to make a difference in the fight against cancer. The brand also offers incredible variety and experiences in the workplace, from actually putting up banners, shaving heads at a CANSA Shavathon, walking with cancer survivors at a CANSA Relay For Life event, to applying sunscreen to men only dressed in speedos as part of Hollard's Daredevil event and even cycling 1,400km from Johannesburg to Cape Town!

■ ***What do you see currently as the main challenges and/or opportunities for your brand sector?***

The lack of resources or budgets for building and maintaining a brand is one the main challenges. There are many non-profit groups and it can be tough ensuring that we stand out or retain that awareness that makes us the first choice to support or be involved with. Having so many target audiences to liaise with is an issue in that we don't get adequate or large budgets so it means we can't adapt our marketing or communication methods to suit the audience. We offer a lot to many audiences and that in itself is a challenge as the simpler the message, the better understood and received. So we're constantly looking at ways of delivering a message that is cost effective, however impactful.

An opportunity is that partners can achieve their goals with respect to their social responsibility. They can enhance their image and credibility in the market through a meaningful partnership with our brand. Our programmes offer an 'emotional connection' that some corporate for profit brands strive for.

■ ***Tell us about a typical day in your line of work. What does it entail and what are some of the highlights?***

Well, on a typical day I could be inducting a new employee about our brand or conducting media interviews and very often preparing or editing media releases and newsletters. Replying to emails regarding marketing materials and ideas for new projects is a regular feature. One of the main roles is to check that all materials adhere to our corporate identity ensuring the brand and cancer message is consistent and properly applied. I regularly speak to volunteers and survivors and gain insights about the way our brand is being perceived, sometimes dealing with complaints and also compliments.

Learning about social media and ways that CANSA can use the many online platforms is also part of my day. One of the highlights is planning training materials and workshops for our staff and volunteers. Being a senior member of the management team opens doors for me to be invited on panels and committees and so much information and networking can be gleaned from participating. Another highlight is promoting and being part of fun and interesting events such as CANSA Shavathon, CANSA Relay For Life events and meeting some incredible sports woman and men raising awareness and funds for CANSA. I get to meet and interact with many advertising, communication and media agencies, many of whom inspire me to learn more about this spectacular industry.

■ ***What does brand management mean to you?***

A brand should be about the experience people have when they engage with CANSA staff and volunteers through services, communication and events. Our multiple income-generating events, as well as our service programmes connect patients, donors and volunteers to the values and mission of the organisation. It's what people say about your brand at a braai or dinners and get-togethers, so it's very important to ensure that we remain consistent and deliver on what we promise. Risk management is part of managing the brand, as well as looking out for new trends and ways to get our supporters to engage

with our brand.

■ ***What brand marketing campaign have you noticed and been impressed by recently/ever?***

The [CANSA Testimonial](#) about testicular cancer awareness is one I so enjoyed. There was no budget on our side and it was created and executed literally on a 'shoestring'. FCB Africa came up with the unique idea of getting the actual testicle to 'talk' and share his cancer journey. It was funny and useful and made sense to the young men we were targeting. This campaign has won many awards including Loerie and also Cannes Lion awards I also think that the Absa Cape Epic is one of the most well-organised and marketed sports events - a true mountain bike experience for the rider as well as spectator. Nando's is also a brand that stands out for their quick, quirky and funny responses to many South African situations.

■ ***You recently cycled from Joburg to Cape Town. What was the motivation behind this expedition?***

CANSA is so fortunate in that we attract many sportspeople that are keen to partner and support our cause, and for many it's about being affected in some way by cancer. Being a cyclist myself I was approached to take part as I had previously cycled from Johannesburg to Cape Town about 11 years ago. But this time, it meant so much more to me as both my parents have cancer (my mother passed away from liver cancer in 2002 and my dad lives with prostate cancer) and very personal loved ones were recently diagnosed. We cycled every day for 12 days on average 100–120 km per day. I gained so much and learned so much about myself as a rider and also interacting with people. People in the smaller towns that we visited were warm and welcoming and most recognised the CANSA brand. When you're with a bunch of people doing something like this, it's an incredible experience that creates a bond and memories that will stay with me forever.

■ ***What inspires you, personally?***

Developing and learning about my capabilities inspires me and also being active. By being active and healthy you can lower the risk of cancer and other diseases.

As part of the leadership team at CANSA, I have encountered remarkable opportunities and also people. The communication and media industry is inspiring in itself. There are so many new platforms, ideas, methods and approaches to present and promote health messages and brands. I also get inspired by young people in this industry as well as in the non-profit arena. They want to be part of a movement and cause and bring some great skills and creative ideas. People that have been affected by adversity and overcome major challenges inspire me, like cancer survivors and caregivers who face tremendous hardships, however they deal with life with grace and passion and don't quit.

Under Balona's guidance, CANSA's Integrated Report has received three best Sustainability Reporting awards and two Merit Awards in the NGO category. CANSA has also been awarded the 2014 'Most Trusted Brand' and 2015 'Most Highly Commended' in the NGO sector by a Reader's Digest survey.

Balona is a chief judge of the PRISM awards, a programme that recognises public relations and communication management programmes adding value to the bottom line through a strategic and business-focused approach. She also

received the CANSA 2014/15 Gold Senior Leadership award.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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