



Deal Makers

WOMEN 2023

Women of SA's M&A and
Financial Markets Industry



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Marylou Greig
Editor

Women's Month in South Africa holds important significance as we continue to work together to empower women in all spheres of life. August is the time to reflect on the many achievements of the brave women of our past who fought against gender, race and class oppression, and to remember them as those who laid the foundation for the gender equitable society we work towards in South Africa.

Although the status of women in this country has improved in recent decades, gender inequalities persist, and the fact remains that women are still largely underrepresented in leadership positions. Education is one of the most important aspects of human development, and eliminating gender disparity starts by building a foundation with education in the early years, on which to increase the status and capabilities of women as they take their rightful place in teams and in corporate South Africa's boardrooms.

This, the third edition of the DealMakers Women of SA's M&A and Financial

Markets Industry, seeks not only to highlight the incredible women in this space, but also to offer inspiration to young women, and to give them courage where needed, as well as the realisation that they are not alone. Reading these profiles and thought articles, the clear takeaway is that feminine traits bring a different dimension to leadership – one that is more collaborative, empathetic and focused on relationship-building; essential elements necessary to complete a well-rounded team servicing an industry which navigates people dynamics.

This year, this feature will be released at the inaugural Women's Day platinum networking event. The panel facilitator is Lydia Shadrach-Razzino, a partner at Baker McKenzie and a previous winner of the DealMaker of the Year award. She is joined by Janice Johnston, CEO of Edge Growth Ventures, Fawzia Suliman, CFO of the JSE, and Ego Iwegbu, co-founder and CEO of The Good Mineral, MSLONDON Cosmetics and Miss Salon London. 

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Benchmark International's all-women sell-side advisory team: pushing the boundaries of success



BENCHMARK
INTERNATIONAL

In the detailed and pressured world of mergers and acquisitions, skills diversity within teams is not just desired, but required. On occasion, the distinctive array of necessary skills happens to fuse within a team that is exclusively female. This is the remarkable story of one such team at Benchmark, where the team's collective expertise sets them apart in the industry.

As a global sell-side advisory firm, Benchmark International prides itself on its deftness in guiding clients through the intricate processes of selling a business to the right acquirer. To do this, a multitude of diverse skills come into play that extends beyond technical proficiency; the process also demands a blend of elevated emotional intelligence and refined soft skills.

It's unusual to find an all-female transaction team within the finance sector, primarily originating from a scarcity of women at this level, in this professional arena. There are considerable challenges faced by women, both practical and societal, that often mediate their career progression. This group of women has each mindfully planned and navigated their own career path while still managing to look after families and enjoy personal interests. In the workplace, they merge their collective talents seamlessly as they prepare opportunities for market. With their expertise, the team ably guides clients towards achieving their transaction goals by researching suitable acquirers or investors, engaging decision makers, negotiating transactions, facilitating the due diligence process, and ultimately, executing successful deals.

Leading this team is Zelda de Kock, the steadfast Transaction Leader. With a decade of experience in property development related transactions, Zelda leverages her extensive background as a qualified attorney and conveyancer to steer through the oft-tumultuous seas of transactions with incisive foresight. Zelda's recent joining brings a fresh perspective that aligns perfectly with our unwavering dedication to providing exceptional

client service. With her meticulous guidance, we ensure that our clients are supported every step of the way through the sales process.

In the crucial role of Project Manager, Maritza Sander stands out as an exceptional multi-tasker. Her distinct skillset, cultivated over 13 years in the sector, affords her a deep industry understanding and the ability to adeptly manage complex tasks and resources. Maritza's extensive M&A experience shines through in her precise and effective approach to project management. She handles project complexities with unmatched ease, ensuring all elements align flawlessly in our ambitious ventures.

Mialise Tolmie is our Financial Analyst, and uses her keen understanding of financial intricacies to skilfully shape each transaction to maximise its potential. Furthermore, she is instrumental in facilitating the extensive and often exhausting due diligence process, allowing our clients to stay focused on their business and core operations.

Debbie van Ballegooyen leads the dynamic outreach department. Her background in teaching and more than 20 years of working as an executive assistant means that her communication and organisational skills are excellent, and she has a deep understanding of executive-level operations. Sheridan Rademeyer's experience in a similar outreach role complements Debbie's expertise and, together, they are a formidable duo. Their unique perspectives and market engagement skills facilitate the forging of meaningful connections with potential acquirers and the gathering of valuable feedback, which aid in identifying exciting opportunities.


Naraileen Corker and Tiffany Geoghegan complete the team as Transaction Executives, providing comprehensive transaction support, seamlessly supporting clients, and nurturing buyer relationships for the multiple opportunities on the go at any given time. Tiffany was previously a Client Administrator at a prominent wealth management firm, and her

technical expertise from her BCom Investment Management degree is complemented by her natural charisma with clients. She effortlessly builds strong relationships while providing exceptional transaction support.

Naraileen has been with Benchmark International since its inception in South Africa, and has recently transitioned from our research department to the transaction team. She has swiftly excelled in her new role, demonstrating remarkable adaptability and prowess. Her inherent care-giving personality makes her an instinctive fit in supporting the team, clients and potential buyers, all of whom respond easily to her genuine kindness.

In this industry, no one person can do everything; success lies in how well a team complements each other. The Benchmark all-female team represents this concept perfectly. Their diverse talents blend harmoniously to navigate the complex waters of mid-market M&A, and while the gender of the team is one aspect of their success, it is not the defining factor. That is their exceptional ability to deliver the results that our clients seek.

This team's narrative of success aligns with Benchmark International's mission: to build competent teams of professionals, regardless of gender. The company acknowledges the challenges that women face in the industry, without letting those challenges define the story. Our focus remains on the competence, professionalism and unique skills that each person brings to the table.

This accomplishment serves as a testament – not to the transformation of the financial sector, but to the potential of skilled professionals to carve their own niche and form successful, collaborative relationships. Benchmark International celebrates the triumph of these formidable women as a shining example of the exceptional outcomes that result from combining diverse skills and the resulting team synergy that pushes the boundaries of success in the mid-market sell-side advisory space. 

Maritza Sander
Associate Director
Benchmark International



Woman of Impact: Maritza Sander 'Employee of the Year in Africa' at Benchmark International.

As we commemorate Women's Day, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the women who have made a significant impact on our business at Benchmark International. We acknowledge the indispensable role that these women play as inspiring leaders within the organisation, driving change and fostering innovation.

For this reason, we're thrilled to spotlight Maritza Sander as our focus of admiration this Women's Month. She's an indispensable figure in our global sell-side advisory firm, and her work – largely behind the scenes – has had an enormous impact on the trajectory of our company, and the clients she diligently serves.

"I was incredibly honoured and humbled to receive this prestigious award. Being named Employee of the Year for Africa is not just a personal achievement, but a reflection of the collaborative and empowering work culture that thrives within our company.

It is through the collective efforts of every team member that we have been able to achieve remarkable results and exceed expectations."

Maritza's rich experience in the mid-market M&A space spans nearly 13 years, of which the past six have been with Benchmark International. Throughout her significant tenure, Maritza has demonstrated extraordinary service to our clients, and is a cohesive element within our Stellenbosch Transaction Office.

She underpins our operations, and her process optimisation skills are the heartbeat that drives our accomplishments.

"I firmly believe that success is a result of a shared vision, effective teamwork, and an unwavering commitment to excellence.

This award is not just a recognition of my individual contributions, but a celebration of the incredible synergy and camaraderie within our organisation."

Hailing from Gauteng, Maritza entered the job market in 1994 and quickly proved herself a sponge for knowledge. She has directed her skills to relationship management, project management, quality assurance and strategic thinking, contributing significantly to Benchmark International's growth strategy.

Her role is a delicate and demanding balancing act, requiring high emotional intelligence, analytical thinking, and systematic problem-solving. Maritza is key in implementing change management and aligning processes to support our Deal Preparation and Deal Execution teams throughout the M&A process.

The depth of Maritza's understanding of major acquirers across South Africa, Africa and beyond is truly impressive. She consistently reads between the lines, eases objections or concerns that may arise, and binds our teams with a tenacity that's difficult to quantify but impossible to overlook.

Described by her colleagues as the engine that drives us forward, Maritza embodies resilience, leadership, meticulousness, loyalty, and unwavering dedication, managing a whirlwind of responsibilities with steady calmness.

The same dedication extends beyond her professional life into personal pursuits, notably in long-distance running. Like her approach to her work, Maritza tackles marathons with relentless determination, showcasing a commitment and persistence that mirrors her professional ethos.

Her participation in the formidable Comrades Marathon, renowned as one of the most gruelling running races worldwide, serves as a testament to her resolve. In conquering the challenging 90km distance, Maritza showcased not only her physical stamina but also her philanthropic spirit, running in aid of 12 charities. This dedication and altruism parallels her approach to work: an absolute commitment to her pursuits, be that orchestrating successful M&A deals or crossing the finish line for a worthy cause.

Alongside her demanding professional commitments and sporting achievements, Maritza prioritises her family. Mother to three, she is active and present in her children's lives, engaging in the needs and adventures of their various life stages.

This Women's Month, as we acknowledge and thank Maritza, we hope to inspire other ladies to identify their own potential, embrace their unique capabilities, and apply these skills in leading others. Maritza's exemplary qualities, tireless efforts, and resilient spirit are truly admired by our firm, and are vital for our growth and success. 