

Making time to give back

Our Personality of the Year 2023 is Amanda Cromhout, the Founder & CEO of TRUTH, an international loyalty consultancy.

Prior to Truth, Amanda was a senior executive for British Airways in the UK & internationally and at Woolworths, South Africa. Amanda has written a book to simplify understanding of loyalty, and is the founder of two charities, KIKA to help educate underprivileged girls, and The Blind Loyalty Trust, prompted by her own sight impediment.

Have you always lived in South Africa

Not at all. I was born and grew up in the UK and after a degree at Loughborough University, I had a wonderful start to my career with BA, on their graduate program.

What made this so special?

They selected students during what was known then as the Uni Milk Round. I joined the BA marketing graduate program and so learned all about Frequent Flyer Programs and co-brands from day one. This experience has helped me in good stead ever since. I moved to South Africa with BA, as General Manager for Southern Africa, married, and have pretty much remained there. At one point at BA I was working as project director for the oneworld Alliance for BA. This was such a useful experience for my career. There were five founding airlines and we basically wrote a BRD (business requirements document) for the oneworld Global Alliance that would bring together the loyalty programs of many different airlines. I remember writing hundreds of pages covering everything about the alliance from how the lounges would operate, how to interchange tiers between programs. It was a whole policy covering every eventuality and every FFP detail.

So when was your consultancy Truth born?

I had been working as Customer Head

for Woolworths South Africa, which is an incredibly forward thinking, innovative retailer that has shone in the past at the International Loyalty Awards. It was an amazing way to really get under the skin of South African commerce. We aimed to drive real customer centricity. It was such a fantastic example of what was possible and it sparked my ambition to focus on customer loyalty with my own consultancy, which I began in 2010.

Your experience was in general marketing, so why did you decide to put the whole focus of the business on loyalty?

I had learnt the importance of being niche. Our clients respect this, and it meant I could become extremely specialised in this important subject. Ebucks, Pick n Pay, The Foshini Group, these are all amazing brands in the incredibly mature South African loyalty market and they show what can be achieved using the concept of loyalty.

Is it possible to always improve on a loyalty program?

Much of our work is focussed on improving loyalty programs as well as creating them. It is the key to successful business, to always be striving to be relevant.



How much of your work is in South Africa?

South Africa is really an advanced village. We know everyone, we have a best practice position in the market and we run loyalty events, but we also work in other African countries, in Asia and in Europe. I consult, I coach and I also write.

Explain about your book that will be published shortly

I was unfortunate enough to have a serious eye infection last year that left me in bed, in serious pain and in danger of losing an eye. It made me think about how fortunate I was to be able to afford the medical care I needed, while so many can't, and I wanted to do something to help. At the same time, I had been wanting to write a book about loyalty, but couldn't find the opportunity or the right angle.

So this was the time and because I spend so much of my business life simplifying problems for clients, I decided to take the same approach with the book

and simplify the subject of customer loyalty. It consists of 101 chapters of 2 pages each, covering every aspect of loyalty across 101 subject areas, with additional insights from experienced contributors.

How will the book help those in need?

I set up a Trust, called Blind Loyalty, which is also the title of the book and all proceeds from the book will go to the Trust. If I help just one person regain their sight, then it will be worthwhile, but I obviously hope we can do much more than that.

You produce a great deal of content on the subject of customer loyalty. What form does this take?

At Truth, we write an annual whitepaper reviewing loyalty programs in South Africa and I am a guest writer in partnership with the University of Johannesburg for academic loyalty content. In addition, I founded the Truth Customer Academy of which I am the Academic Director. This is now one of the world's biggest online loyalty training platforms, serving over 500 students around the world. I take my greatest pleasure professionally in 'teaching' and coaching via the Customer Academy online courses, my loyalty mentorship program and keynote speaking.

On top of all of that, Truth hosts the annual Leaders in Loyalty Summit, where

cornerstone of this. For example, loyalty should be to the airline brand, not about the loyalty points. This is demonstrated very strongly when things go wrong. With a good Frequent Flyer Program, the customer will be contacted, kept informed, and helped with alternative arrangements. It makes it worthwhile to be in a top tier. The loyalty program enables this to all come together. It glues all the disparate pieces, to make the customer feel valued. Insurance companies can do the same. No one is going to get excited about insurance, but Vitality, for example, draws you in, so you link your activity watch, engage daily with its App, and earn points for exercising or driving well and then get rewarded.

How important, or dangerous is ChatGPT to loyalty?

ChatGPT has a place but it won't redefine loyalty, just like NFTs didn't.

It will be nice to have aspects of this artificial intelligence, but it must stay in its place. The fundamentals will remain the same. Transaction is the price tag, the school fees, while the emotional part is how it makes you feel.

So is loyalty just for high spenders?

Not at all. There is a trend right now, particularly noticeable in the UK grocery sector, for brands to move to money saving offers, differential pricing for loyalty members and in some cases a



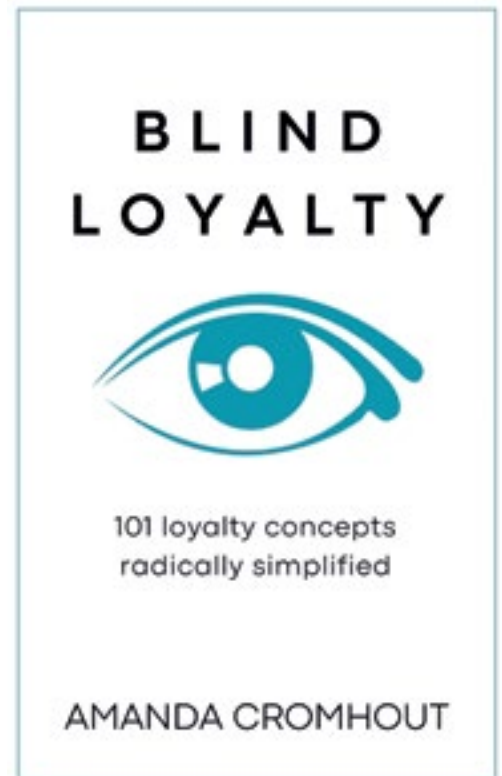
over 100 top loyalty professionals come together for an annual loyalty conference.

Internationally, we network with other agencies to provide global coverage and will work with freelancers as and when necessary. It means we can deliver in all world markets.

Where do you stand on the subject of transactional versus emotional loyalty?

Loyalty isn't a program; it is the connection to the brand and trust is a

whole new pricing structure. But loyalty must straddle from the high spenders to those on the breadline. Grocery is about the most basic of spend and is a necessity, but everyone has choices. I have seen examples recently of basic till slip scanning programs to earn points which really have a place at the present time, with people very keen to save. Sometimes the savings are very small, but it can make a real difference. There is a place for these, and also for personalised offers and vouchers. At the same time there remains



a place for points. When consumers are asked do they want instant discounts or to save up their points, they say "Both!". So it is a complex world for loyalty professionals to navigate!

What charities are you involved in and what is your motivation to make time for these?

I truly believe you have to give back. So this is what I have been doing, with my involvement in charity work. I have co-founded The KIKA Trust, which helps educate underprivileged girls and more recently and with a very personal connection – The Blind Loyalty Trust.

How can the loyalty industry help?

A contribution of 100,000 rand (£5,000) can save a person's sight in South Africa. This is what we are aiming to achieve for under-privileged individuals. I am calling upon the loyalty industry globally to support Blind Loyalty. I need your help to either direct CSI monies to the trust, or for you to personally donate, or by buying bracelets for yourself or corporate year-end/conference gifts. If you are a retailer, please sell these bracelets in your stores as a symbol of hope, whilst giving the gift of vision.

To donate, or to pre-order 'Blind Loyalty' (due to be published at the end of 2023):
www.blindloyaltytrust.com
www.kikatrust.co.za
www.truth.co.za
www.amandacromhout.com