

# Motheo Matsau, Ster-Kinekor Theatres' acting CEO

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Motheo Matsau, who was appointed as deputy CEO in September 2019 recently took over the reigns from Ryan Williams, who had been CEO since January 2018.



Motheo Matsau

Matsau has been with the company since May 2016 and was Sales & Marketing executive prior to his appointment as deputy CEO. Before Ster-Kinekor, Matsau has worked for several leading South African and multinational companies including Unilever, Standard Bank and Multichoice.

Williams tendered his resignation to commence a new chapter in his life with his family in Australia but is consulting back to the business on a few key strategic projects on a part-time basis.

Matsau tells us that he looks to help grow the business after the impact of Covid-19 has passed...

■ ***Congrats on your new appointment as acting CEO of Ster-Kinekor Theatres! How do you feel about it?***

Thank you so much! I am overwhelmed and excited to be given this opportunity to head the biggest cinema exhibitor on the continent.

■ ***Any other career highlights to date, besides this?***

I've been very fortunate in my career and have been given great opportunities in all the organisations I've worked for before joining SKT. I have also had luck on my side when it came to bosses. I have worked for and under people who have mostly seen the good in me and the potential I had. This in itself is a highlight. Not many people can say the same.

Certainly, being made deputy CEO in 2019 stands out and I have had the opportunity be part of the relaunch of a couple of sites that have gone through refurbishments like Sandton City and Carnival City. Shortly after I started, we opened our state-of-the-art cinema in the Mall of Africa which includes an Imax cinema, and we were able to open our second Imax site in Cape Town towards the end of last year.

■ ***You've worked for several leading South African and multinational companies including Unilever, Standard Bank and Multichoice. Tell us a bit about your experience.***

Working at these varied multinationals has really allowed me the ability to learn how different industries work from banking to FMCG. The FMCG industry is like cinema in terms of how fast-paced it is, with short lead times.

Through it all, one thing has remained constant. That is, no one can do this job on their own. One relies and depends on teams of people to make things happen and that is what I hope to continue doing in my new role. Working with people who are clear on what needs to be achieved and are passionate about what they do. A big part of leadership is getting the best out of people.

■ ***When did you start at Ster-Kinekor and tell us about your time working for Ster-Kinekor?***

I joined Ster-Kinekor in 2016 as chief marketing and sales officer where I was tasked with marketing the Ster-Kinekor brand to increase attendances and grow its in-cinema sales and advertising offering. Along with my Ster-Kinekor sales team, we have succeeded in demonstrating the impact and many benefits of cinema advertising to current and potential clients and advertisers.

I've also experienced one of the most important projects any company (like ours) could ever undertake and that is the changing of the business operating system. This is the backbone of the operations, finances, CRM, sales, programming and content scheduling of this business.

Basically, the business and the change from our previous system to our current one was one of the highlights of my time here because it exposed our strengths and areas of improvement almost immediately.

■ ***What does the role entail? What are your responsibilities?***

The scope of the role is very broad and includes nurturing the relationships we have with our key partners and stakeholders like distributors and studios, landlords and our teams. Covid has possibly changed the business forever and I'm going to be focused on leading the adaptation of the business to our new world.

We also have shareholders who need to be comfortable that the business is being run as it should and I will also be focusing on ensuring that what the business promises to those shareholders is delivered.

A lot of good work has been done over the last two years and we need to continue building on that and improving on that foundation.

■ ***What do you love most about your career, the industry and working for Ster-Kinekor?***

I love the fact the no two days are ever the same. Our commitment is to showcase movies on the big screen the way movies are meant to be seen on the big screen. I love the fact that we are part of many guests' memories in terms of first dates, family outings or being part of their first cinema experience. I love the fact that as an industry we are responsible for hundreds of thousands of people's careers, because our industry employs people who are starting out.

Our industry is also a very important part of the arts and culture because not only does it display the artistic expression of filmmakers, but it also allows consumers to enjoy the stories that they prefer to watch the best way those stories can be watched. Ster-Kinekor is not only the biggest cinema chain on the continent but has its roots in one of the oldest. This gives one a huge sense of responsibility and it makes one want to only give his best.

### ■ ***Comment on the current state of cinema in SA and globally and the impact of Covid-19.***

Globally the cinema industry is one of the worst affected industries by the Covid-19 pandemic. We have seen big film studios postponing content in an effort to find the best suitable time to release it. This action by studios is a good reminder of how important the cinema industry is to filmmakers and studios.

Big budget films can make up to 55% of their lifetime revenue from cinema. As a result, cinema becomes an important part of the film industry's business model.

So, the impact of Covid-19 may be felt for years to come in the industry globally. We have seen the industry slowly come back to life globally as different countries lift or ease their lockdown restrictions. Even though SA only recently re-opened the industry, the same trend is evident.

We are expecting the attendances to continue to increase week-on-week. Having said this, in our business content is king so improved business performance is a blend of the films we have, the capacity we are allowed to host and the confidence of our guests. Ster-Kinekor has implemented all of the global best practices in ensuring that our environments are safe for our guests and so we believe that those that choose to visit us can do so with peace of mind that their welfare is our top priority.

Our industry has survived two World Wars, several major disease outbreaks, the advent of television, video stores and the internet, and continues to show strong Box Office growth every year. Covid has shaken up many people and industries, but we are confident that in time, things will be better, and that collectively we will recover the ground and time that was lost during the past few months. We are also ready to adapt to whatever conditions the environment presents and to whatever our consumers require.

### ■ ***What's at the top of your to-do list (at work)?***

Navigating through the next couple of months where content is limited and ensuring that the business is ready for 2021 when content starts flowing out of Hollywood. Our dependency on Hollywood has also been a challenge for many English-speaking territories and SA is no exception.

I will be also working on a few ideas with a number of stakeholders to try and ensure that we reduce this dependency and that we find alternatives should we be faced with this challenge in future.

Another task that needs to be delivered is instilling confidence in our employees. We have, due to Covid and the lockdown, had to go through a traumatic period for our staff and even had to retrench a few people. We need to make our employees aware that the business is doing all it can to save jobs and ensure a future. We are unfortunately faced with challenges on a global scale and we may not always be able to implement the changes and solutions we want but may be forced into difficult situations. Our staff needs to be reassured of this.

Ensuring that our guests and partners are reminded of the importance and power of cinema as a movie platform, advertising platform and one of the most-loved social activities.

### ■ ***What are you currently reading/watching/listening to (for work)?***

I try to attend as many screenings as possible, so I have a feel for the content we are releasing. Currently I'm reading a lot of case studies and papers and reports on Covid from other markets to try and understand what is happening and what we could possibly experience.

I listen to a lot of music when not working just to help me calm down and relax a little. We've had a very stressful six months and for us there is still some time to go before we see the business and industry return to 'normal', so one tries to find mechanisms to relax and recalibrate as often as one can.

■ ***Tell us something about yourself not generally known?***

I would have loved to have been a lawyer...

## ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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