

DISCOVER *iKASI*

When planning a trip to South Africa, not many people would consider visiting a township. Entrepreneur Ntsebenziswano November believes that can and should change.

WORDS: EUGENE YIGA



Langa Township



As a boy, Ntsebenziswano November didn't know what he wanted to be when he grew up, but he was always interested in nature and travel. "The only things we were ever exposed to were doctors, policemen and lawyers," he recalls. "I fell into that category as well and wanted to be one of the three until the World Cup was announced. It was then that I wanted to be in the tourism sector."

Although his initial dream was to become a flight attendant, he enrolled at Cape Peninsula University of Technology to study travel and tourism after completing high school in 2004. He applied too late and admissions were full, so he chose to

study IT at Stanford Computer & Business College for a year, after which he studied Business Information Systems at Oval International College.

He enjoyed what he learned – his subjects included programming, software development, economics, marketing and management – and he gained valuable skills when it comes to understanding business fundamentals, how the world works and thinking on a bigger scale.

"I knew that the future was in the technology sector and I wanted to make sure I was well equipped for the boom years of this industry," he says, "but because my interest was in business I mixed both IT and business together."

Langa Township Old
Hostels Township mural
art - Cape Town



"I never finished, however, as I didn't write my final exams in my third year. I was even given a chance to go back and write in January, but I didn't go. To this day I still don't know why."

Perhaps he sensed that life had bigger plans? Growing up around his grandparents, who sold wine and beer, he'd been forced to stand at the counter and attend to customers. He never thought much about entrepreneurship at the time, but always knew that if he started a business it wouldn't be selling alcohol.

"After I dropped out of college I had to find a way to make extra cash," he recalls. "Not just for fun but to start something that would help me become my own boss."

"I was surrounded by people who wanted the same thing and we started brainstorming ideas, from selling printed T-shirts and used books at universities, through to starting a car wash. We went as far as googling the best business ideas."

ONE CHALLENGE AFTER ANOTHER

In 2008 Ntsebenziswano risked the savings he'd built up working as a collections customer service advisor at Edcon Financial Services. He was later promoted to supervisor and bought 20 computers with the aim of starting an internet café. That never materialised because every time

Imizamo Yethu Township
Tour - Iziko Lobomi Craft
and Information Centre

Lwandle Township - Migrant labour Museum walking tour

Khayelitsha - 18 Gangster Museum bike tour

Bike Tours

Khayelitsha - Makukhanye Art Room (Award winner of Fleur du Cap)

NTSEBENZISWANO NOVEMBER'S FIVE TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Know what you want and be passionate about it.
2. Plan for what you want and set goals.
3. Connect with people in the same field.
4. Don't be scared to be different.
5. Don't be scared to fail.

he went to shopping malls in his community he was told that someone was already on the waiting list with the same idea. "It was never easy," he says. "I was met with one challenge after another, and at the time I still had a lot to learn. I failed in many businesses. People didn't respect me because I was always one of the youngest people in meetings." Still, he persevered, even after he was fined R10 000 by inspectors who visited a site he was working at and found that he wasn't fully compliant, nor were his employees registered for UIF.

Yes, it made him scared of starting

a business after that, but it didn't stop him from launching his latest venture, DiscoverIkasi, an online platform that showcases the best places to eat, sleep, party and tour in townships. "The business is still a start-up and my typical day is spent reading emails, checking social media groups that I follow for any news and updates, calling prospective clients and meeting current clients," he says. "Most recently I started going out and visiting people, asking them about their experiences with tourists; finding out what they enjoy about what we do and how we can make townships more accessible.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY IMAGES

The biggest appeal for others is the fact that Discoverikasi is managed by locals. The platform also makes it easier for them to find everything they need.”

As the co-founder and CEO, Ntsebenziswano runs Discoverikasi with two employees and spends a lot of his time mentoring providers to better run their own businesses. That said, it's hard to help communities come up with new experiences and act on implementing them, especially with the elderly who aren't convinced that technology can help them get more customers and improve their lives.

“My first real job was in a call centre. Funnily enough I'm still working there while managing Discoverikasi,” he admits. “If I was focused on my current job, I'd be a business analyst by now because of my studies and my experience in the field, but I want to invest all my energy and time into Discoverikasi. I feel that out of all the businesses I've ever started this is the one that will make it.”

OPENING UP THE MARKET

Although he believes that the local tourism industry will continue to grow, despite the challenges we face, he also feels that little has been done to sell the townships and the experiences that they offer. More than that, he believes that South Africans aren't doing enough to sell our country and that many citizens would prefer to travel abroad instead of going local.

“The move to mobile technology means everything is now easily available where customers and business can communicate using mobile devices,” he points out. “They open up the market to everyone, but the increase in social media reviews can be both a positive and negative for any business.”

More negatives include the political climate, visa restrictions and crime. But after 10 years as an entrepreneur, with valuable communication and problem-solving skills, he believes that it's not impossible to overcome the negative misperceptions about South Africa and its townships.

“Always be present is the best career advice I ever received, although it took me over a year to understand what this means,” he concludes. “I teach people new things about their own businesses and get them to think bigger every day. The key is to have patience, passion and an eye for opportunities.”

www.discoverikasi.co.za 

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