

Access to Shoprite market allows entrepreneur to thrive

Sammy Mhaule got his first taste of entrepreneurship as a 14 year old when he sold ice cream on the streets of Tembisa. Today he supplies sparkling juice to Checkers Hyper in Gauteng and Checkers in the Free State, but the journey from ice cream peddler to business owner hasn't always been smooth sailing.

“The members of my family are not wired like me and they did not understand why I was willing to risk so much to run my own business,” says the 39-year-old, who has formal qualifications as a mechanical engineer and marketer.

The idea for his products came from an opportunity to capitalise on South Africa hosting the 2010 Soccer World Cup by supplying non-sparkling juice to hotels. “After the World Cup I got requests for my juice to be more readily available on retail shelves. My challenge was to not introduce yet another fruit juice. I wanted a product with character, which would stand out from everything else on the shelves.”

His light-bulb moment came one day as he was walking down a drinks aisle and realised there weren't many sparkling juices in which at least two flavours were blended. He incubated this idea for 18 months, a period in which he also enrolled in a supplier development programme. “I knew I needed support to develop myself to ensure Skyrule Drinks thrived.”

In 2017 he was approached by Celia Theron, a former divisional buyer for the Shoprite Group, who had heard of his product and took a keen interest in it. In the same year Theron joined Skyrule Drinks as its National Key Account Manager.

Within a year of that initial contact his drinks were available in Checkers Hyper stores in Gauteng. They are also available in Checkers stores in the Free State and they now have their sights set on supplying to the Eastern Cape in the near future.

Skyrule Drinks is based in Kempton Park. It was important for Mhaule to locate his business close to the community that nurtured him and today he employs ten people from the area. He describes the last year as tough, but very rewarding: Skyrule Drinks was among the top 20 at the 2018 South African Small Business Awards.

For Mhaule the best part of being an entrepreneur is the knowledge that his destiny is in his own hands. “There is nothing glamorous about being an entrepreneur. You must have the right reasons for starting your business. You also need to know how to use your gifts to achieve your goals.”

In 10 years' time, Mhaule hopes to own three manufacturing plants in three provinces. “I also want Skyrule Twyst to ultimately be the beverage of choice for every customer that walks into a Checkers or Shoprite store,” he concludes.