

Mobiz, the startup changing how SA corporates talk to customers



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Mobiz, an innovative South African startup combining the ubiquity of SMS with the visual power of the web to change the way South African companies talk to their customers.

Mobiz' SmartSMS product allows businesses to send out SMSes to their customers with a link to a web page personalised to their needs and expectations.

So, for example, a fashion retailer wouldn't just be restricted to sending out its winter specials. Instead, it could send out personalised deals and discounts based on a person's spending patterns, past purchases, and other characteristics.

The kicker? The web pages are zero-rated, meaning that businesses can access their customers, even when they're out of data.

Since its founding, Mobiz has attracted an impressive client base that includes the JD Group, Woolworths Financial Services, Old Mutual, and Momentum.

We chat to Greg Chen, founder of Mobiz, to find out more about the five-year-old startup's journey...



Greg Chen, CEO of Mobiz

■ **Can you tell us a bit about Mobiz?**

Mobiz is a mobile customer engagement tool which helps bring brands closer to their customers so that they can tell them the right story at the right time. Essentially, we bring together the ubiquity of SMS, customer insights, and the power of the web.

In doing so, we allow brands to speak to their customers as individuals rather than an analogous whole or as pre-defined segments.



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■ **When, how and why did you get started?**

Mobiz was founded in Cape Town in 2014 when myself and Clark Lin, our technical head, saw several major trends coming together.

Firstly, internet access was becoming increasingly affordable and ubiquitous amongst all handset types (feature and smartphone), meaning that the web would play an ever more important role in the lives of ordinary South Africans.

Second, people were demanding more personalised experiences in every aspect of their lives. We felt that any organisations which catered to those demands in their customer messaging stood to see serious gains.

Finally, when we looked at the options available on the market at that point, we knew that there was a gap for a product that

utilised SMS and the web to provide the kind of experience customers wanted, and which allowed organisations to provide that experience as simply as possible.

▣ **What is the core function of Mobiz?**

Mobiz's core function is to help bring brands closer to their customers so that they can tell them the right story at the right time. We do this by allowing retailers to easily create and deploy SmartSMS's through our easy to use online platform.

“ Marketing departments use Mobiz to create messaging that combines feature-rich landing pages with a combination of text, videos, surveys and polls, and voucher redemption. ”

Collections departments, meanwhile, utilises Mobiz to deploy SmartStatement, which takes the hassle out of invoicing, reducing the costs and workload for an organisation's finance department. Mobiz team can also fully manage and automate this solution for clients.

▣ **What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?**

A key obstacle we overcame was businesses worrying about data cost for their customers when engaging with the SmartSMS. In 2018, we partnered with all South African network providers to make our technology zero-rated for consumers.

“ One of the biggest obstacles we've faced is the resistance to change in large organisations. That's understandable. Gatekeepers are there to keep the organisation safe. But it's still frustrating when you know you've got something that could help them. ”

An interesting challenge has been educating organisations on the benefits of a self-managed solution like SmartSMS. Despite the fact that it can be as simple or complex as the organisation wants, many would rather have someone else manage it for them.

However, it always a super rewarding experience when our customer realise how easy Mobiz is to implement in their operations. As an additional service, we do offer fully managed solutions if using Mobiz on a day-to-day basis is not possible for the enterprise.

▣ **What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?**

Don't get stuck in the continuous loop of refining a concept. Focus on creating a scalable MVP that target the easiest market even though it may not be the largest, then grow from there.



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▣ **What has been your proudest achievements thus far?**

Mobiz is designed to empower marketers, so every instance of our customers utilising Mobiz differently than we've envisioned feels like an achievement for us.

▣ **What does the future of entrepreneurship look like to you?**

The fundamentals of entrepreneurship - spotting a gap in the market and building something to exploit it - will always remain the same. The difference in the future is that, as technology continues to evolve, those gaps will open and close faster.

“ Entrepreneurs will have to be increasingly nimble to take advantage of the opportunities available to them in the future. ”

I cannot speak from experience as we haven't engaged with these types of programmes on our journey thus far.

❏ **What is the importance of startup accelerator/incubator programmes?**

However, I can imagine that If you can find the right accelerator or incubator, they can be useful in exposing you to experienced entrepreneurs and investors. They can also open up the networks needed to help your startup grow. I also believe these programmes can offer invaluable insight on how best to refine and commercialise your product in the current market, which should make the day to day grind of building and growing your business that much more rewarding.



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❏ **What would you like to see changed in the South African startup landscape?**

More local VCs with the tenacity, strategy and channel to grow South African born concept into the global market at a more accelerated pace.

❏ **What do you believe are the traits an entrepreneur needs in order to succeed?**

Don't be scared to fail fast, and just like Nike's brand, *Just Do It*. Everyone has 100 ideas, it's the ones that are executed on which succeed in the end.

❏ **Tell us about your biggest struggles as entrepreneurs, as well as some major highlights.**

Mobiz was not our first product, my business partner and I started this journey 14 years ago with a concept very similar to Whatsapp.

The VC scene back in the mid-2000 was much more risk-averse than it is now, and so creating a sustainable business with just initial angel funded seed capital has been an interesting struggle. I think we were able to turn our struggle into our major highlight today, being able to use our knowledge and capital accumulated to create Mobiz.

Entrepreneurs
Indaba

Entrepreneurs gather at Indaba in Cape Town

Event Partners 23 May 2019



❏ **Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?**

Make no mistake, entrepreneurship is incredibly challenging. It can come with some very deep lows. But nothing beats the high of cracking a major solution that'll change people's experience. Don't just want to be an entrepreneur because you don't like the grind of working in a corporate environment. Don't do it out of a position of negativity. Trust me, you will need positive energy to have a chance of creating true value.

❏ **What is the importance of entrepreneurship?**

Entrepreneurs are, by nature, problem solvers. If we are to properly take on the world's biggest problems, we need more entrepreneurs. It also fosters self-belief. I think too many smart individuals with brilliant concepts are too afraid of failing, so if our institutions can come together to foster entrepreneurship then I have no doubt that we will be living in a much brighter future that exudes positivity and confidence.



Greg Chen, CEO of Mobiz

▣ **Where would you like to see Mobiz in the next 5 years?**

Although our current focus is on large retailers with only a minor footprint in small business utilising our technology, we would like to see small business around the world using Mobiz as their platform of choice to innovate their unique and personalised way to engage with their customer base.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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