

Business accelerator for fashion entrepreneurs launched

Marketing agency Nonzero is collaborating with Standard Bank to create the Business of Fashion accelerator programme, 'Threads - stitched by Standard Bank', to boost South Africa's up-and-coming fashion designers and turn them into powerful fashion CEOs.



In order to supplement the programme with an academic backbone, the team partnered with the e4 Impact Foundation, an initiative of the Università Cattolica of Milan, focussing on impact entrepreneurship. Together, they created a 12-week curriculum that focuses on the business operations of a fashion enterprise from financing and retaining employees, to lean manufacturing and e-commerce, as well as specialised procurement methods and marketing.

The programme is open to all fashion entrepreneurs with existing business operating in South Africa for at least one year. It is taught simultaneously from four regional classroom hubs: Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth.

Twelve-week programme

Working with the Standard Bank Incubator and a strong eco-system of partners in business including Mercedes-Benz, government and civil society, the programme uses the expertise of some of South Africa's top business minds and thought leaders, as programme teachers. The programme uses case studies and experiential learning exercises to reinforce the academic learnership of the programme with practical industry insights.

It takes place two evenings per week for 12 weeks. The participants will also be taken on action learning field trips across South Africa designed to highlight best practices across the country in various fields.

At the end of the programme, the participants will be invited to present their new business model in a business case presentation to a panel of judges, and the winning participant will be taken on an international trade trip to Europe. The key focus of this trade trip is a meeting with a high-impact private distribution network enabling the participant to liaise with and present their business/products to wholesale buyers and retailers, as well as attending trade fairs.

The winning participant will receive an SME start-up pack courtesy of Standard Bank, will become a Mercedes Benz brand ambassador and drive a new vehicle for a 12-month period, as well as benefit from continued mentorship by the Threads team.

Business of fashion is essential

The global fashion industry today is worth \$3 trillion, however, sub-Saharan Africa accounts for only 1% of that. It is not that the industry lacks creativity or access to finance but that its members do not understand the business of fashion. Fashion entrepreneurs need to be supported in professionalising their enterprises into running a profitable business, capable of competing on the international apparel scene, creating jobs and having an impact on the South African economy.

“Standard Bank is fully committed to driving sustainable, long-term growth on the continent. Our support of the Threads programme forms part of our greater vision, encouraging inclusive economic development for entrepreneurs across South Africa with the aim of creating positivity and prosperity for all in Africa – now and in the future,” says Jayshree Naidoo, head of the Standard Bank Incubator.

“What we’re looking to do is support the entrepreneurs’ creativity with the crucial business know-how, mentorship and support that will propel the business to the point where it is experiencing real growth and running as a professional outfit. The partnership with Standard Bank is a key to delivering on this goal.”

“It was important for us to see a strong tangible impact come from this programme. This is why we organised a trade trip to Europe and decided to take it one step further and work with industry experts for all of the individual modules of the course,” explains Tania Habimana, co-founder of Threads programme and Head of Content & Digital, NONZêRO.

To participate in the Threads programme, interested entrepreneurs can [apply online](#) before 11 October 2017.

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