

# Radical is the new normal at FNB

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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The whole payment mechanism space is evolving, and Innovation is not about cool gimmicks, but rather creating a meaningful internal and external environment, says new head of FNB Innovation, Yolande Steyn.



Yolande Steyn

## Getting staff thinking

“Innovation is at the heart of FNB’s DNA. Internally there has been a massive cultural shift, and we are creating a safe space to teach staff to innovate.”

The FNB Innovators programme has rewarded staff with over R42m in prizes since its inception in 2004. “All types of innovation require a degree of independence, so that people can work in a specific way without having to worry about the constraints of red tape. We want our people to think and act differently. We want them to be able to change the status quo.”

“The innovation strategy serves as an incentive for entrenching a philosophy of entrepreneurship among our staff and enables ideas that make a difference, so we can efficiently serve our customers,” she explains.

Steyn says the bank has introduced several learning opportunities for staff, both in the real world and through TED-type broadcasts on the company intranet, which have had a tremendous uptake. “Seconds after we announce a learning session, all the spots are taken up.”

FNB CEO, Jacques Celliers, adds: "There is no rule book, and a lot of what change is all about is allowing people to make mistakes."

## Getting small businesses off the ground

There is a lot of innovation going on in the engine room, but often ideas have to be parked, because the environment isn't quite ready for them to be introduced, he says.

About 80% of start-ups in South Africa fail in their first year. Yet small businesses are seen as a catalyst for growth and development. Hence, the importance of supporting these businesses cannot be understated, so Celliers says, FNB is re-engineering its whole approach to small business.

The result is the Instant range of business solutions, which has approximately 102,000 customers. The free service allows fledgling businesses to open a business account, do their CIPC (Companies and Intellectual Property Commission) registration and BEE certification, all online, as well as providing accounting and invoicing systems.

FNB also supports a number of incubator programmes to help start-ups get off the ground.

## Other innovations

Other customer-focused innovations include the FNB Connect sim card, which has 200,000 subscribers and the eWallet, which has 6,7m users who transact R1,4bn every month, Celliers says.

And while bank branches seem to be becoming a relic of the past, in FNB's case, they are being reinvented. Celliers explains that cash-accepting ATMs can accept bulk cash and coins, with the record being R222,000 being counted and deposited in 93 seconds.

But, he says, roll-outs are staggered because the needs of clients differ across the country. "A client in Matatiele isn't looking for the same thing in banking services as someone in Sandton."

## ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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