

The Barn Khayelitsha launches e-commerce course

The Barn Khayelitsha supports local entrepreneurs through its community-based incubator and aims to address the community-specific challenges that entrepreneurs are facing by providing business development skills tailor-made for them.



Baratang Miya from the Cape Innovation and Technology Initiative (CiTi), Project Head of the Barn Khayelitsha, said: "We have found that many of the entrepreneurs and women in business from these communities are crafters and artists. They create beautiful items, but reaching an audience wider than the market stall or the boot of their car is a challenge we would like to help them overcome."

A better chance of survival

"By removing some of the obstacles these entrepreneurs face," said Chris Vermeulen, Head of Enterprise Development at CiTi, "and coming alongside of them through mentorship and other business skills training, their businesses stand a better chance of survival, and growth, than what they did before The Barn Khayelitsha, and our message of inclusive growth for entrepreneurs in this country is affirmed."

"Becoming IT enabled is vital to the success of business growth for entrepreneurs," said Ian Merrington, CEO of CiTi. "Many of the entrepreneurs' only piece of tech is a cellphone, and even that is not always a smartphone. Becoming IT enabled means The Barn Khayelitsha is making available tech and connectivity to empower and aid these entrepreneurs to trade in a relevant medium and manner."

This does not talk to the nature of the business idea, which can be low tech or non-tech, but rather to the mode in which business is carried out.

"E-Commerce is just one way we are helping entrepreneurs become IT enabled," said Vermeulen. "Exposing these entrepreneurs to a wider audience through IT means that we get better test data and better to-market business strategies for their start-up ideas. A more satisfying result for the participants is the increased income potential for the entrepreneur generated by online trade."

VeloCiTi Enterprise Development programme

Deidre Luzmore is founder and CEO of MzansiStore.com, which operates as an online market, showcasing local crafters and artists, and allowing online shopping and delivery of these otherwise small market-bound products. It was also recognised as the Top 40 Most Innovative Companies in South Africa in August 2014.

Luzmore said: "As a single woman founder, building a tech-enabled B2C e-commerce business, I have certainly taken on a huge challenge. With the assistance and strategic focus I got from attending the VeloCiTi Enterprise Development programme at The Barn, MzansiStore.com grew its database of creative suppliers from one to close on 100 by the end of 2013, of which 40% are SME B-BBEE businesses."

The e-commerce course at the Barn Khayelitsha kicked off recently with a select group of 20 candidates actively participating in the workshop, which will facilitate a firmer understanding of the relevance of e-commerce in today's trade, as well as provide the opportunity for candidates to create their own accounts on the MzansiStore.com site, where they can load their products and customise their landing pages.

"Collaborating with CiTi and The Barn Khayelitsha is an exciting opportunity," said Luzmore, "but what really excites me is how closely CiTi is listening to the needs of entrepreneurs in Khayelitsha and Mitchell's Plain. This programme is not a replication of what is being offered at other incubators simply to fulfil a quota, rather it directly answers an urgent need of entrepreneurs in this area. Presenting an e-commerce course is absolutely the right tool for these entrepreneurs at the right time."

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