

Easy access to criminal records, identity verifications



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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MyImprint, a tech startup that provides easy access to criminal record and identity verifications, is the first of its kind to innovate a digital consent verification system in South Africa, making it a completely paperless system from start to finish.



Daniel Shefer, co-founder of MyImprint

Businesses and individuals across South Africa will now have the ability to run criminal and identity verifications via MyImprint, a user-friendly online portal - using only an ID number as reference.

We chat to Daniel Shefer, co-founder of MyImprint, to find out about starting up the online portal, the challenges the company faced, learning to fail and the traits an entrepreneur needs in order to succeed.

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

I spent the first eight or nine years of my working life in a very different space. I worked for a company that did big mining and infrastructure projects in Africa. This gave me really great access and knowledge into business - I had fantastic exposure to great minds, big business, dealing with high-level politicians and large corporates.



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After a couple of years of this, I noticed that my ambition was leaning more towards building new things, not just building bigger things. This is when I decided to go out on my own and see what the world had in store for me. And that was the beginning of my journey as an entrepreneur.

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

I think the biggest challenge that any entrepreneur faces is the fear of failure. Due to the nature of entrepreneurship, failure becomes a very personal thing and is hard to accept.

The key to this for me was accepting failure as the best way to learn. We never know beforehand what will work, especially when it comes to building new things, but if we can learn what doesn't work, we have a much better chance of making the things that do work, work well.

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

I think the biggest piece of advice I can offer other young entrepreneurs is to learn how to fail. Failure is probably the most consistent part of being an entrepreneur. You need to be able to give something your absolute all but also be prepared that it may not work or work out the way you thought it would. Even when things do work out, the chances that they are exactly what you had planned in the beginning are very slim. Being able to adjust and mould your business without being emotionally attached, is really hard.

“ *By nature, entrepreneurs are emotional and passionate about what they are doing and often find it hard when things don't go according to plan. When you fail, you need to take it as a lesson and be able to move on to the next opportunity without judging yourself to the extent that you lose your conviction in yourself.* ”

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

I think my proudest achievement so far has strangely enough not been the most profitable one. Starting my first successful business completely on my own with nothing but a lot of ambition (and a credit card) was very rewarding. It is one thing to be able to do business when you have all the resources you need at your disposal. It is quite another thing to be able to do it all on your own from scratch and turn it into a success.



South Africans can now run criminal and identity verifications nationwide via online portal

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

I think one of the exciting things about being an entrepreneur is that you don't really know what the future will hold. You throw yourself into whatever it is you are doing at the time. Make it your life. And back yourself with no real backup plan. Principally speaking, I guess my ultimate goal is to be able to create some kind of organisation that enables other entrepreneurs much like myself in the early days, that takes ideas and turns them into business.

■ **What is the importance of start-up accelerator/incubator programmes?**

There is no question about it, incubators and accelerators play a very significant and critical role in the world of start-ups, particularly in South Africa, but the biggest problem with them is that they require excellence. Money is so risk-averse here in SA that unless you are a model of excellence at the very least, you're unlikely to get any seed money.

Although I see the value in incubators, the timing has never been right for me to apply. I was lucky enough to have great partners and mentors around me every day, so we managed to raise money without needing an incubator. There are so

many smart, young people in this country with great ideas but no capability of turning those ideas into businesses, simply because of lack of experience.

“ I think incubators should focus on ideas rather than capacity, technical ability and business models, and give people the tools to turn those ideas into a business, regardless of their experience. As the saying goes, you can teach anybody anything, as long as they are willing to learn. ”

Technical ability can be taught or found, but young visionary people with great ideas are few and far between.

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

I think there are two major things that need to happen in South Africa in this regard.

- We need to have access to more as well as riskier money. Venture capital is not accessible enough.
- We need to be able to expand our reach north of the Limpopo.

It is no secret, our market of users with disposable income is just not big enough for any real tech company to make the big-ticket businesses.

However, Africa has over 1 billion people in it. If you travel around Africa (which I have extensively) you will see Americans, French, Chinese and many other people penetrating the African market. But few South Africans. This is true for all types of business, not just tech business.

The reason for this is debatable, but it doesn't change the fact that this is true. South Africans need to make use of the advantage that Africa is on our doorstep and ready and open for business. Instead of our entrepreneurs being successful locally and then going to the USA or EU, we should rather look to push our products and ideas on our own continent. We also have a unique advantage in that Africa, in general, has in many ways skipped the analogue age and is either well on their way into the digital age, or on the cusp of it. Communication is a good example of this.

Africa largely skipped the 'land line' era and jumped straight into the mobile age. Connectivity is still an issue, but I think we would be hard pressed to find someone in Africa who doesn't have at least one mobile device, if not two.

Having this dynamic makes this market much easier to adapt and shift to new technology and so we should take advantage of this and focus on our doorstep and develop our own continent.

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

I think there is no perfect recipe for what makes a successful entrepreneur, but I do think there are a few things that form the core on which one can build.

- **Identify your weaknesses and focus on your strengths.** So many people spend their time getting better at what they are not good at that they never reach their potential in what they are good at. Do what you are good at perfectly and source other people around you who are perfect at what they are good at (and what you lack).
- **Be willing to take one step back in order to take two steps forward.** Often people get caught in the world of material things and overwhelming obligations. You have to be willing to cut your lifestyle back today to make more money tomorrow. Sell your car and buy a scooter if you need to (I actually did this...more than once). No one cares what car you drive.
- **Start early.** The older you get the harder it is to cut back. So, take the leap sooner rather than later. Do it before the bills get too big and you get too comfortable.
- **Don't be afraid of money.** If you are afraid of money you will put it on a pedestal and treat it like it's something that cannot be lost and then found. Treat money as a tool; a means to an end. Success is not always (or only) measured in money. If you measure success by achieving your goals, then the money will come anyway.
- **Don't be greedy.** Find an excellent team of co-founders and share with them. You are better off having a smaller percentage of something big than a big percentage of nothing. No one can do everything on their own, so find people you like, trust and have qualities that you lack, and then share the pie fairly.

■ **Tell us about your biggest struggle as an entrepreneur, as well as some major highlights**

Getting MyImprint off the ground is definitely one of the major highlights for me. It took an enormous amount of effort and

strategy to get it to a place where we could take it to market and once we had all the elements lined up, we rolled out in record time.

No small feat, I assure you of that. It was amazing to see an idea (not mine, by the way, one of the other co-founders) turned into a business from the ground up. This was only possible because of the amazing team we have and investors who believe in us. I guess the biggest challenge we have as entrepreneurs is that we never have enough money.

By nature, businesses develop so fast and in directions that were never intended and so in order to keep up with the ever-growing new opportunities, there is always a need for more money to facilitate growth. This speaks directly to one of the other points below in that capital is not as easy to find as it should be.

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

It takes a very specific type of person to be an entrepreneur and not everyone is built for it.

“ You have to be adaptable, resistant, diligent and able to handle high-stress levels and get through the tough times to find the light at the end of the tunnel. ”

Having said that, the benefits of being an entrepreneur are tremendous. The most exhilarating part of it all is the sense of achievement when you do finally come out the other end. Being able to look back on the journey and know that you were an integral part of its success is more rewarding than any corporate job can ever give you.

Being an entrepreneur, especially in the tech space, means you are actively participating in building things for the future. What's better than knowing you are part of a solution that will change the way people do things?

■ **What is the importance of entrepreneurship - especially in a country such as South Africa?**

Entrepreneurship, especially in South Africa, is probably the second most important thing next to education.

Small and medium-size businesses are, without a doubt, the only way to build our economy and create jobs. We have a fantastic opportunity in South Africa to nurture and incentivise new business and even more so, to take those businesses, products and services and offer them not only to our own people but to at least a billion more of our African neighbours.

So what we have, is a lot of smart and capable people and a giant market. Surely this is a recipe for success not only for our people but also for our country and our economy.

■ **Where would you like to see MyImprint in the next five years?**

The technology, and more importantly the team, is a first of its kind in many ways and has an amazing ability to execute new plans and ideas on the fly.

I think MyImprint has the unique advantage to become the biggest database of quality biometric data allowing it to be the number one trusted verification platform. I would like to see the database grow, be an industry leader in making businesses and homes safer, and making jobs more attainable and accessible through our technology.



If the future in Africa is mobile, identity verification is paramount

Sherry Zameer 25 Apr 2018



Biometrics are only getting started in South Africa and as early adopters, we think there are huge opportunities to grow the business and expand the offering in new directions as the industry in general develops. We are really excited to be in this space and can't wait to see what the future in biometrics hold for all of us.

For more about MyImprint, go to <http://myimprint.co.za>.

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