

iTorho Technologies is making it easier to do formal business online



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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iTorho Technologies is a free platform that enables entrepreneurs to list their offerings, manage bookings and client information, as well as receive payments was created with the mission of catalysing broader economic inclusion for SMMEs.

The platform connects communities to skilled service providers in their immediate location, while also enabling business owners to adopt more efficient business management and customer relationship tools.

Njabulo Khulu, founder and developer of iTorho, explains that only 20% of small business owners use e-commerce in their businesses on a regular basis, but due to the digital uptake during Covid-19, it's become a case of either adopt or die since e-commerce keeps businesses relevant.

“ Now more than ever, SMMEs need a marketplace where customers are able to locate them, book appointments and pay online, after all, convenience is the ultimate currency. ”

Khulu tells us more about the startup journey.



Njabulo Khulu, founder and developer of iTorho

■ ***Can you tell us a bit about iTorho Technologies?***

iTorho is a software company that develops business software. iTorho stands for i Tour home services whilst the isiZulu translation is 'The Pursuit of Opportunity'.

iTorho was developed to provide software as a solution to small business owners for their business management problems. In order to make them more efficient and participate in the formal economy. We make doing business easier.

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

After a career in financial services / investment banking and FMCG / beverages, I had a different view on solving African problems due to my formal experience.

I realised that more than 60% of SMMEs struggle to raise funding and that's due to a lack of formal record of their business transactions. This means that their growth multiplier is limited in comparison to the 40% who can. And for a prosperous nation to thrive, we need to improve the earning capability of the 60%, so they can hire more people and also finance their growth.

That's when software as a solution became an ideal solution in my mind. Whilst developing my professional skills, I started taking interest in software, fintech and developing smart cities on how to solve inequality.

I left formal employment, enrolled in Futures Studies at the USB and started the iTorho journey to digitalisation of South Africa. I looked at the direction the country was headed in and realised that a solution like iTorho will help small businesses to thrive in the digital age and create a platform that will help more South Africans get used to doing business digitally - especially for service businesses.

■ ***What is the core function of iTorho Technologies?***

We make it easier to do formal business online for SME services. We provide customer relationship software and business management tools that enhance the efficiency of small businesses whilst marketing them to a wider audience to attract new customers through our marketplace platform.

In a nutshell, we connect SMEs to customers and manage the record of bookings and transactions for increased income generation.

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

Developing a platform desirable for the market to adopt has been a challenge. We've had to reduce complexity in order to drive adoption. The version yet to be launched will be closer to the simplicity we seek to driving adoption and shifting a culture towards doing business digitally full-time.

SME services wanted an easier solution, so we had to make it intuitive for clients. We have also had to develop our marketing skills/knowledge as we are business technocrats and not particularly skilled in marketing - especially managing marketing performance.

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

It's lane 8 of the 400m race. You are ahead, but only by circumference. You won't know where you really stand until about the last 60m left of the race. You have to build a lead that when the favourites come through the bend in lanes 4, 5 and 6, you've built a lead enough to make it through the last 60m. The only way to keep that "lead" is if you run your own race.

“ You are an underdog in entrepreneurship and you will need to beat Goliath every day - at home, in your habits and in your soul - because things won't go according to plan and you will need willpower to survive the droughts. ”

Build emotional stamina and learn to work with people. Truth of the matter is, entrepreneurship is similar to an Olympic sport. You need a team to win the Olympics: No one is self-made at the Olympics - people are coached, people have teammates and sparring partners, people are challenged before the games. You have to qualify for the games before you even earn a gold medal.

And that's entrepreneurship. You have to qualify to have sales and thus a business. Is your business sales-ready? Are your books in place? Is your brand equitable? Are you compliant?

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

I was chosen to take part in the Dimension Data Enterprise Development Programme which upskilled me and I raised capital to get started from the Department of Trade and Industry.

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

I think entrepreneurship will save this country, especially if entrepreneurs adopt community empathy.

“ We have many problems in South Africa, which means there's a demand for solutions. ”

I believe we will have entrepreneurs that will take this country forward.

I've seen some exciting projects from engineers at Stellenbosch around Spatial Management as example. So the generation of solutionists has started.

■ ***What do you think is the importance of startup accelerator/incubator programmes?***

Accelerator/incubator programmes are crucial in connecting entrepreneurs with a community of like-minded individuals, as well as access to learning tools that help in driving businesses forward. These programmes are also good for networking and building structure around your business. I think it's important for aspiring entrepreneurs to have that experience to build confidence.

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

I think incubators could work closer with universities to give students a chance to work with entrepreneurs and build their resumes.

Pre-seed funding is needed to get projects to market and a StartUp Policy is needed to prepare South Africa for the next decade.

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

Self awareness, willpower, endurance, people management, public speaking and positive energy.

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

Funders fund businesses, not concepts which means more time spent looking for finance vs. building the business. In addition, recruiting tech development and business partners to follow a concept is tough - you need business sales and income to gather support.

Further to this, not achieving targets due to delays in state funding affected our launch dates, and we've had to bootstrap the business to where it is today. I was originally working with a software house too and then funding delays meant we had to build with independent developers to continue momentum in the business which affected our agility in development.

When Covid-19 hit, we had to move focus to different categories in order to service the market. We found some success with our private chef service in Level 2 - our bakers were booked and busy for home birthdays.

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

It's a lifestyle. You and your work become one entity. You manage your schedule and control your time. You live according to your standards, so set high standards. Execution is the name of the game. You are taught to be self-disciplined.

■ ***Where would you like to see iTorho Technologies in the next 5 years?***

I would like us to expand across multiple African countries enabling financial inclusion and potentially working with a global investor who's looking for Africa returns.

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