

The story of a personal care range built on love, and how it bounced back post-Covid

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*Outdoor media owner Tractor Outdoor's **#20in21 SME Initiative** was born out of a desire to support South Africa's small and medium businesses (SMEs) that were dealt a blow by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, Tractor Outdoor celebrates its 20th birthday, and thus aims to give 20 qualifying SMEs a marketing boost via its nationwide outdoor media network, with a total media value of R8 million, helping these businesses increase top-of-mind awareness.*

This is the story of NativeChild, one of the beneficiaries of Tractor's #20in21 SME Initiative.

Founded by entrepreneur Sonto Poee, NativeChild is a local natural hair and bodycare business. The product range, which was born of Poee's difficulty in finding personal care products that did not irritate or aggravate her skin, was initially created for the under-served needs of women of colour, but soon saw itself attracting customers outside the initial target market, as a result of both its vegan credentials and performance.

When Covid-19 took hold across the globe, her business immediately felt the impact. Says Poee, "Many of our raw materials are imported, and when borders were shut, the acquisition of these materials suddenly became a serious challenge, resulting in delays of up to three months or more.

"The knock-on effect of this supply-demand situation is that costs suddenly escalated; and we had to absorb these margins, because a pandemic is not the time to be increasing prices given the fact that the consumer purse is already under pressure."

Poee explains that another consequence of Covid-19 and lockdown was that - when NativeChild was finally able to access raw materials and packaging - it had to double up on order volume, given that there was uncertainty around another possible clamp down on trade. "We found ourselves walking a tight rope between ensuring we had sufficient materials, while managing cashflow."

Ironically, with South Africans homebound during lockdown, there was a spike in customer interest, and "we struggled to keep up with the inquiries!" she says.

Pooe says that with the easing of restrictions, business is back in full swing - but the economic impact of the past few months has taken its toll, and she is currently focussed on managing expenses and increasing revenue. "My current focus is on education, with a view to increasing awareness and ultimately driving sales. Advertising plays a key role in this."

As one of the beneficiaries of Tractor Outdoor's SME Initiative, NativeChild will receive a media package that includes outdoor advertising across the media owner's extensive outdoor network, social media and PR exposure, digital assets and online promotion.

Concludes Pooe, "Being part of Tractor Outdoor's SME Initiative affords us the opportunity to grow our customer base - out of home media has significant presence, and allows us to get our range in front of more people.

"The timing could also not be more ideal. The advertising presence will not only support our expansion into major retail, but will also help us recover some costs incurred as result of Covid, helping us become the household name we aspire to be."

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