

Celebrating 53 years of being the people's brand - the Teljoy journey

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In 1969 a small company with a big vision started its journey - a journey that would change the way South Africans connected to the world, and a journey that would disrupt the restraints of the product ownership model.



Jonathan Hurvitz, Teljoy CEO

That small company was Teljoy. Teljoy's founder, Theo Rutstein, aged only 27 at the time, was frustrated at having to listen to the first moon landing in 1969 on a radio, instead of watching it on television like much of the world, due to a ban by the government on televisions. It was Theo's passion and determination that took the fight to parliament and was responsible for having the ban lifted and bringing television to the country, so that South Africans could watch world events unfold on their own television sets.

Theo knew that the cost of this new technology would be a major barrier for many South Africans and so Teljoy's model became one of affordable access, through renting, rather than owning. Upon returning from a research expedition in the United Kingdom, Theo placed an advert in four South African newspapers with the provocative copy: "When TV comes into the country there will be two million people wanting a set. Will you be able to get one?". There was no request for money, only for a signature agreeing to rent a TV set from Teljoy when (not if), the time came.

The resounding success of the campaign and Theo's unrelenting grit and determination lead to Teljoy installing the very first television set in South Africa in 1974, five years after the company had been founded.

The rental model, although high risk in a market cautious of change, took flight. Why? Because Theo entered the market with people-centric values. He was all about empowering the people of South Africa to enjoy what the rest of the world was enjoying in a way that they could afford and would not get them into debt. The early model of rental evolved into 'rent-to-own' – a term coined by Theo – which gave customers the option of owning what they had been renting, once the rental term was up.

While TVs were the springboard, Teljoy continued its foray into innovation and bringing new technology to South Africans. In the 1980s, Teljoy brought VCRs into the country and in the 1990s, the company was the catalyst for bringing cellular technology into South Africa.

In his book, *Second is nothing: Creating a multi-billion rand cellular industry*, Alan Knott-Craig, a senior executive at Telkom, and Vodacom's MD from 1993 to 1996, recalls how the idea of bringing cellular into the country almost literally hit Theo on a trip to London in 1992, when Theo and Teljoy's CFO at the time, Dennis Kennedy, were almost struck down by a bicycle courier who had a mobile phone against his ear. It was this seemingly coincidental event that caused Theo to realise that cellular technology was the next big thing that South Africans needed.

What happened next was a partnership between Teljoy, Vodafone, Telkom and the newly created Vodacom, which saw cellular technology and mobile phones being introduced to the country. Teljoy was one of the first cellular network providers with a goal to sign 30,000 contracts in four years that was reached in just two months!

After offering a few products online in the digital revolution of the 2000s, which saw massive success, Teljoy began phasing out its bricks-and-mortar stores and went 100% digital. “This strategic shift amplified our rent-to-own purchase model, giving more customers flexible and affordable ways to enjoy the things they wanted in their homes and in their lives,” says current Teljoy CEO, Jonathan Hurvitz.

“In between all of these big milestones, Teljoy was actively seeking ways to bring more to South Africans – give them more access to products in a flexible way that wouldn’t get them into debt and to support them more in living the lives they wanted,” says Hurvitz. “We have continued to add more to our offering, from home and kitchen appliances to gaming consoles, to tech to furniture, and even fitness equipment and we are always on the lookout for the next big thing. We have always been driven by the needs and wants of our customers, and what we know all South Africans deserve.”

Today, on 2 June 2022, Teljoy celebrates 53 dynamic years of impacting people’s lives and being a catalyst for a major shift in the history of South Africa.

As we mark this special day in Teljoy’s journey, we continue looking forward to a future where the power of flexible purchase remains firmly in the hands of the people. Teljoy will never sit still. It will continue to lead innovation for South Africans and continue to bring to our country’s people what they need and what they deserve.

Happy birthday to the people’s brand.

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