

Aura security app to aid beleaguered Uber drivers

By Ilse van den Berg

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A revolutionary new app that provides speedy security assistance and cuts emergency response times has become a welcome safety measure, especially for beleaguered Uber drivers.



The app, Aura – based on geo-locating technology – already has a response network of 62 of South Africa's best local and emergency response providers.

Aura was designed to put an end to the dread of having to wait for help by providing a speedy response service. Founder, Warren Meyers, says he noticed that Uber was experiencing significant security issues across the country and would, therefore, benefit most from the national Aura response network.



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More than 1000 roaming response vehicles are fitted with an Aura responder device that instantly deploys them to Uber drivers under threat, in any location and at any time.

The Aura device is integrated with the Uber drivers' app. All that a driver in trouble has to do is press the button which sends all his/her details and location to Aura. Once this information is received, a roaming security vehicle that is closest to the driver in distress is autonomously dispatched to assist.

We chat to Meyers to find out more.

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

In 2010, at the age of 24, I started a business called Myertal in Cape Town. We launched the business - offering a vast basket of both tech and manpower security products and services. We persevered through the recession and by 2012 we had broken even.

We then decided to branch out to Johannesburg but our strategy shifted focus to more tech-based solutions due to their scalability and value-add.

We sold off our guarding contracts and positioned ourselves as offsite CCTV monitoring specialists. We use an ex-military video analytic software which is hardware agnostic (can bolt into any new or existing CCTV infrastructure). The software has AI which takes +- four days to self-learn the client's environment after which it is able to prioritise video of interest to our 24/7 offsite monitoring facility.



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The technology enables one operator to effectively monitor many cameras as he/she is only being presented with prioritised video. This monitoring service is primarily sold as a substitute for conventional security guarding services which are high in cost and low in value.

From 2014, the business achieved some impressive scale but we were consistently struggling with one specific problem: getting the armed response companies out to an incident in time! This was mainly due to two reasons: 1. The dispatch process was very manual and involved multiple people and 2. The low-paid reaction officer would often take the long way round in order to avoid confronting and fighting criminals.

At the beginning of 2017, we began building the Aura platform with the mission to make effective security more affordable and accessible in South Africa. Aura is a technology company which supplies customers with immediate and autonomous access to the closest armed reaction vehicle, nationwide.

■ **What is Aura's competitive advantage/core differentiator? Is there anything similar in the market?**

Current armed response products only protect you when at home and when the alarm is armed. Aura is an "anywhere, anytime" security service.

Aura is the only national aggregator of armed response services in South Africa. We have partnered with SA's best armed

reaction companies to enable customers to access them as one consolidated force.



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Our technology ensures autonomous dispatch and compliance. When an activation is received, the closest armed response vehicle is autonomously dispatched and the response time pre-calculated.

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

Struggles:<!>

- Everything I've done has been completely new. There were no guidelines/YouTube videos I could watch to get help.
- Finding strong people to help achieve our goals and objectives.

Highlights:<!>

- Building our new control room in Johannesburg.
- Seeing our first Aura version working from activation to dispatch to conclusion.
- Closing our national deal with Uber.

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

Access to funding in the initial stages of a business. SA angel investors and venture capitalists usually want to see revenue and product market fit. The catch 22 is that entrepreneurs need seed capital to get to this point.

■ ***What's next?***

We believe security needs to become more of a right than a privilege. Our mission is to make effective security in SA more accessible and affordable.

For more, go to [the Aura website](#).

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here.

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