

NOWNOW becomes reality for young entrepreneur



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Imagine this...you're 16 years old, you're in Grade 10 and you're sitting in a classroom and all of a sudden an idea comes to mind - an idea that later became a reality for Eohan Lakey, founder of NOWNOW, a marketplace for local fashion designers and brands.



Eohan Lakey, founder of NOWNOW

Lakey shares his journey as a young entrepreneur...

■ **What is NOWNOW?**

NOWNOW is a growing marketplace for local fashion designers and brands.

■ **How did the idea come about and when did you get started?**

The idea behind NOWNOW came from a simple class project I had in Grade 10 at Rondebosch Boys' High School. Never in a million years would I have thought that I could take a class project and actually apply it in the real world. That was the year I officially started investigating the business idea, this was midway through 2016, and started pitching it to my classmates.

We officially launched in 2018. It's funny as I decided I would fully pursue the dream of starting NOWNOW about two weeks before I was supposed to enrol at Wits to start my B.Com Degree - my parents weren't too happy with that decision. Telling my parents that I was going to take a gap year and pursue this business idea took a lot of guts but it meant I had to

prove to them that I could do it and since then it has been a crazy rollercoaster!

▣ **What is the core function of NOWNOW?**

In essence, NOWNOW acts as an intermediary between designer and customer. We've created a platform for designers to sell their products (additionally to any other ways they currently sell it). We also provide a space for anyone in the world to find South African and African fashion.

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

Firstly, capital. As a youngster fresh out of high school, I didn't have much money to throw towards starting a business (something I should have thought about before starting NOWNOW). I had to create a solution to this which prompted me to start looking for a job. After being rejected from multiple restaurants, I got a job working at music festivals as well as coaching sports at Rondebosch Boys' Preparatory School.

Secondly, knowledge and experience. You can only extract 'so' much information from the internet and YouTube but won't exactly find all the answers and nothing beats experience, from what I've learnt.

The first few months were simply trial and error, after watching every video, listening to every podcast and trying to read a few books here and there. I internalised enough information for me to get through the first year of running, but make no mistake, I'm still learning new things every single day.

Lastly, motivation and creativity. Entrepreneurship can be tough! Staying motivated all the time can be difficult when things don't go the way you want it to go. On multiple occasions my creativity had 'dried up'. I've learned that motivation and creativity work hand-in-hand as the more motivated I am the more creative I become and vice versa.

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

My advice for other aspiring entrepreneurs is always try and learn more from things and people around you.

“ *The biggest disservice you can do to yourself is having too much pride to ask for assistance and guidance from those around you and more experienced than you.* ”

Also, don't be afraid to put yourself out there, the fear of rejection is a major issue but the easiest way to overcome that is actually to be rejected (trust me, I know). You honestly never know until you ask.

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

My proudest achievement so far is the fact that I've been able to have an impact on the industry - no matter how big or small it may have been. The fact that people know about NOWNOW and have an invested interest in the store blows my

mind; it means that what I'm doing is really having an impact.

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

Entrepreneurship, although super risky in the South African economic climate, is bright in South Africa.

On a more personal level, I've seen more of my friends and acquaintances (around my age) take the risk of opening up their own business, since I launched NOWNOW, which to me means that entrepreneurship is growing stronger.

“ We need to foster and promote these skills as this is exactly what we need in South Africa - every extra entrepreneur means more jobs are created in the private sector which ultimately will improve our unemployment crisis. ”

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

I would love to see greater government support in regards to entrepreneurship and the startup landscape. I truly believe that entrepreneurship is the aspect that could improve wellbeing of all in South Africa. By supporting local entrepreneurs we are breeding the next and greatest innovations within this country.

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

Every entrepreneur will give you a different answer, but there are three traits that will always remain the same: Creativity, Hard work and Inner locus of control.

Without these three traits, it's very difficult to make a success of any business you put your mind to.

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

The biggest struggle for me would be to continuously be innovative. This specific trait is coupled with creativity, this drives innovation as innovation is the essentially the result of creativity through what I have experienced.

The biggest highlight would be me making it onto a TV programme within the first six months of running the business. To me, this meant that people took notice of NOWNOW and truly resonated with the brand. Another major highlight was when I shipped my first every international order; this blew my mind as it was completely unexpected.

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

To be an entrepreneur is a tough task, I personally see myself as someone “training” to be an entrepreneur as I haven't reached the goals I've set out to classify myself as an entrepreneur yet.

Heading the entrepreneurial route is a risk, but if that's what you have a passion for then do it, it forces you to continuously work hard, push the boundaries and expand your critical thinking. Starting a business is a very scary thing but with the right guidance, belief and hard work you'll be able to do it. As my dad always tells me, “just do it!”.

▀ ***What's your future plans for NOWNOW?***

NOWNOW will be going through various improvements and additions, the most notable will be to launch our first group of designers in the rest of Africa with the goal of being the leading marketplace of its kind in Africa.

We are also finalising the planning of our manufacturing wing of NOWNOW that will be providing our designers the best and most cost efficient manufacturing facilities and abilities specifically geared at small designers.

As our slogan states: Your People, Your Fashion.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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