

Big business support pays off for e-magination

While many entrepreneurs have vision, drive and commitment, they are often constrained by limited management capacity, compliance requirements, and difficulties in gaining access to finance. "But these challenges can be overcome with the support of large businesses," says Richard Bezuidenhout, who, with the support of Woolworths, started e-magination, a small but growing information technology and consulting firm.



The core focus for e-magination is providing solutions for business using IT investment and business intelligence. It mines and analyses information with a view to identifying and solving business issues and challenges. For example, if a retailer wanted to understand the profile of customers that took up a special offer, e-magination could isolate the required sales intelligence and assist with the analysis. The company carries specialised skills in a variety of product technologies, including Actuate, BIRT, Database Development and Design, and Data Warehouse. e-magination is 100% BEE owned, managed and staffed.

Seeing potential

Bezuidenhout worked for Woolworths IT department for five years and in 2003 he started thinking of what it would be like to have his own business. In 2007, after preparing a business plan, he made the leap and registered a close corporation. He decided to approach Woolworths and offered his services as a consultant.

Woolworths recognised the potential of his offering, but also had an acute understanding of the challenges faced by new businesses. Woolworths provided e-magination with office space, business mentorship and a multi-year services agreement with terms that are conducive to growing a new business.

Fawza Essa Woolworths group director: IT and Supply Chain says, "We have a number of small businesses which we support in this way and we do this for two reasons mainly. Firstly, Woolworths is deeply committed to supporting previously disadvantaged entrepreneurs and secondly, the proposal has to make commercial sense for both parties. It helps when we know the parties as in the case with Richard who has always been a loyal employee and highly regarded in our IT business unit."

Woolworths is currently e-magination's largest client but they have also worked with other large corporates and local Government's expanded public works programme. The company also provides advice and support to two NGO's at no cost as part of their social contribution.

International growth

Bezuidenhout's growth plans for the business go beyond South African borders. In conjunction with business intelligence consultancy Cortell New Zealand, he has already completed a project for New Zealand's Auckland International Airport. He says, "The project has definitely opened international doors for us, and we hope this is the first of many more."

The Cortell project originated when Bezuidenhout was planning a holiday to New Zealand in July 2010. "Being an entrepreneur, before I left I called up an old colleague, a previous manager while employed at Woolworths, to discuss the possibility of doing some consulting while in New Zealand and from there it snowballed," said Richard.

She introduced Bezuidenhout to Cortell and the companies joined forces on a project for Auckland International Airport to upgrade its business intelligence system. e-magination fulfilled the lead technical role, and prepared the plan to enable a



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successful upgrade. The initial meetings took place in New Zealand while all the technical work was done in South Africa. e-magination also assisted with training and advising Cortell consultants on how to administer and manage the IT architecture and servers.

For more information go to www.woolworthsholdings.co.za or <http://www.e-magination.co.za/home>.

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