

Yusuf Abramjee shares insights from Lead SA and Crime Line

 By [Mongezi Mati](#)

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In Tribes, Seth Godin shares how you can build something that people care about, a movement that goes far beyond being a passing fad. Lead SA and Crime Line are exactly those movements in South Africa, and arguably in Africa.



Yusuf Abramjee, who is behind Lead SA and Crime Line, is one of the South African minds who seems to understand the art of building causes that the community cares about.

These movements grew rapidly while addressing a need the South African community had, and continue to gain traction. The question is, can this kind of logic be applied to business and building other movements?

Question: What research was done before building Lead SA and Crime Line?

Yusuf Abramjee: Lead SA was born in 2010 following a long period of consultation with our various teams. Primedia Broadcasting's radio platforms are inundated - on a daily basis - with stories of extraordinary active citizenship, including the major challenges that exist in our society.

Lead SA was an obvious choice for us to stand up and make a difference. Although we were expecting a lot of criticism and well aware of the mammoth task before us, Lead SA continues to grow from strength to strength. We have great South Africans and that is enough to make us hopeful about the future.

In 2006 Talk Radio 702 went out on-air asking for people to send SMS tip-offs about drug dealers in communities, so the station could pass it on to the police. The flood of tips was amazing and highlighted the need for an independent tip-off service that protects the identity of tipsters.

We subsequently hit the ground running in 2007 and after six years we receive an average of 3,000 tip-offs a month. This led to the launch of Crime Line.

Q: Were these the first community-driven initiatives you built? If not, what valuable lessons did you gain to build these two?

A: I started out my career as a teacher and eventually pursued my passion as a journalist. I predominantly covered crime. Back then, journalists had a lot more access to crime scenes and over the years I've built invaluable contacts in the police.

My experiences have allowed me have the necessary perspective and understanding of the dynamics to tackle a project like Crime Line. I'm also a firm believer in the importance of education and by extension active citizenship, which falls perfectly in the ambit of Lead SA and what we are striving to achieve.

Q: Does the fact that Primedia has platforms to engage the masses, contribute to the growth of Lead SA and Crime Line? If so, would the growth be as rapid without these platforms?

A: Absolutely and absolutely. Both are projects driven by the public and resonates with what people care about.

Q: What unintended lessons came out of these platforms that were applicable for business purposes?

A: You never stop learning, so the shortest answer is, I have taken many lessons from both initiatives and they allow us to steer projects forward.

Q: *Instead of another campaign, like other businesses, why did you create what became a community-led platform?*

A: The problem with campaigns is that they become, by definition, short-lived and the community rarely feel like they can take ownership.

We make it clear that our initiatives would not be what they are without the input, buy-in and drive from members of the community.

Q: *Did Lead SA, with the rapid growth of social media during its launch, grow quicker than Crime Line over the same period? What is the secret?*

A: It would be like comparing apples to carrots. Crime Line's focus is solely on crime, while Lead SA covers a larger number of issues and that drives a lot of the content.

Interestingly enough Crime Line's growth on Twitter has been phenomenal considering that the Twitter page is only 1 and a half years old.

Q: *With the ever escalating marketing and advertising costs, what can small and big businesses - in your experience - take from these movements and use immediately?*

A: Social media has changed the game in advertising and marketing. This is a good thing, as it allows us to communicate directly with our markets. However, it is a fine balance and it also means that the way we communicate changes radically. Not to be entered into lightly.

Q: *What did you learn about the South African community in building Lead SA?*

A: That we have a vibrant society built by citizens who want to be in charge of their country's future. The stories that come our way are testimony to this and they are a great inspiration to me and definitely to Lead SA's vision.

Yusuf Abramjee spoke at TEDx Johannesburg on Thursday, 15 August, and shared insights about active citizenship and how their platforms act as enablers.

What other movements have you seen in Africa that change perceptions and organize people?

Share your insights about enabling collective action in business, have you seen any interesting cases?

ABOUT MONGEZI MTATI

Mongezi Mati founded WordStart to help companies generate buzz around their products and services among South African influencers. He is passionate about helping brands to connect the dots from social media, digital data and human interactions outside the web. Mtati is also digital analyst, a speaker and a contributor on some of South Africa's leading platforms.

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