

Interview

Part 1: State of the company; vision/goals: success stories

- **Could you please share a brief background of your company/startup and what inspired you?**

OK, so, I'm the founder of response 24. We started the business shortly after my family went through a brutal pharma attack and we wanted to give people an ability to request help at the push of a button and to give you a voice when you can't speak for yourself. So, our journey started shortly after the attack and my background is that I know cell phone technology very, very well. I've been in the industry for over 14 years at that time and I wanted to give create an application that gives you the ability to request help. When we started, I was also studying my BA degree in the University of the Free State. The Swiss programme was introduced as a way to support entrepreneurial ideas and it was absolutely just an idea and in fact... I started to write the business case as a way of getting over the trauma and then the programme was introduced and through the programme, there was a lot of validation that that it's a good idea, it can make a big impact. Then we basically made the top ten of South Africa to join the Swiss programme in Switzerland and in Zurich for two weeks. And I think we went through the programme in 2014 and then our start up was selected to be the most innovative; to have a quite a big global social impact. So yeah, that's sort of where our journey started.

- **What is the vision of your company or which business goals are you aiming at?**

The vision is to globally impact service delivery. So we've grown from a mobile application that changed the phone into life mobile panic button into a full ecosystem that is currently rolling out to 35 African countries, currently rolling out to North America and Canada. But the vision is to globally impact service delivery and that relates to safety and security emergency tap services, but it also expanded into any other on-demand type of service delivery where you can measure the last service delivery. So, the vision is to impact service delivery globally.

- **What about the business goals?**

So, the first thing is to help companies operationally optimise operations and to ensure visibility in line of start of the internal and external resources. By doing that, we reduce response times. We started out in reducing response times in the security and emergency services and as a result, if there is fault response in in emergency cases then it's a lifesaving solution. If there's fault response. let's say, a safety hazard, it may save the business from burning down or so there's multiple ways on how the business, our solution impact service deliveries in different industries. Safety and emergency is one, but we also seeing quite a big growth in facility management in optimising operations. So, it's very well aligned to make sure that the company

has the ability to save cost by optimising the internal and external resources and also to increase their revenue by having a competitive advantage to be able to respond faster irrespective of what the service is.

- **How has your project evolved since you participated in the SABI program?**

It's not a fast journey. It now starts feeling like it was overnight. The programme has facilitated a lot of structure and a lot of I would say it made my vision bigger. It gave me the belief that we can make an impact not just in South Africa but in other countries. It gave us the confidence that we are able to compete on a global scale and that belief is realigned the vision to focus on the right things. I would say we're quite result driven so. And I think the programme has given us the foundation to do that. To access the training and the support through the programme and refining what we do and how we do? But I think also more importantly, understanding what we don't do is sometimes more valuable than knowing what you do because instead of trying to be a solution to everyone out there, knowing what you don't do has been, I think that to me has been quite a game changer as well for us.

- **Could you please highlight some of the success stories of your company since you participated in the AIT Swiss - African program?**

So let me start with the product: the product from a business to consumer application to a full on soft software as a solution platform which in fact started to impact not just a specific industry. It's starting to impact multiple industries and also has now has the ability to impact cross industry. So, I think that's that was quite a quite a big win for us.

We're not just an emergency solution or just a security solution, it is now at a place where it relate to any service, any device anywhere in the world. So, I think that from a product perspective that's what we wanted to position ourselves.

From a financial perspective, we've concluded in the last 20 months contract to the value of over \$108 million of which one of them is a global licencing agreement and through that agreement it is rolling out to over 35 African countries and the moment, North America, Canada. We've just recently opened up a, no we're not opened yet, but we've recently registered a company in the UK and from a funding person we just raised \$5m on a company valuation of just over \$15 million. And remember we were fully self-funded in the beginning; we had a seat round about in 2018. We managed to stay open and standing throughout the whole COVID period. We managed to keep 98% of our Staff. So ,I think there's a lot of wins throughout the training, absolutely.

Part 2: Experience in the AIT Swiss - African Program

- **Think back to when you participated, could you through more light on your experience and what were your key takeaways from the program?**

To be very honest with you today, looking back, I don't really recognise the young entrepreneur sitting in the first class and they're talking about IP and there's a whole lot of people in the room. That's called Doctor, and they're talking about IP protection and I'm like, what is this IP Protection. What are you talking about? (...) I remember saying to myself, I don't belong here. (..)I don't even know what these people are talking about. So, looking back at the person sitting in the first meeting and being introduced to the programme, I was like it's all positive. But you know there's no way that, that I'm going to be able to do something meaningful. I don't even understand what they're saying, but the journey has been very helpful. I learned very fast that they weren't talking about the internet protection they were talking about intellectual property. And I learned very fast and that has become the company's greatest asset - the experience through that I would say that because the value added was the continued support while you are part of the programme. That, to me, was the biggest positive: Somebody checking in on somebody realigning and redefining your vision, your product offering, and your value proposition. I think the methodologies and introduction to some of these methodologies like business model we still use it today in our business and that's how we built the business key objective results. So, there was a lot positives out of the programme. I think the friendships within the ecosystem while you are part of the programme was exceptional. You know, as I remember being in Switzerland, and we're sitting in a class with people from all over different regions from the Swiss sort of environment and hearing people talking about, you know, certain type of battery that can be more economic, and even the takeaway from that conversation in the way that person thought about this solution was very valuable and why we approach a a certain problem, so even if the discussions are not relating to something that might be relevant to what you're doing, the experience and the approach to your problem was still very, very relevant.

So, I think what I miss most about the programme is that check in and that sort of well market access. We were quite close to the Swiss Embassy, so being invited to the Swiss Day, the Swiss event, that was very powerful, that was very valuable. And when you start not being part of the programme anymore, the sort of the things that you miss is the access to market, the access to the mentorship because in every single level throughout the journey you need to stay connected because the training behind the scenes can be very, very tough and I think knowing that everyone within the programme sort of faces similar challenges. You know someone - the guy next to you is not giving up – so, you don't have the option to give up, and tomorrow you're the one that's inspiring somebody not to give up. So, I can just say the fact that you don't have the option to give up when you start something.

- **Why do you think you felt lost in the very beginning?**

Well, I think initially well I might be wrong, but I initially I looked at the people that was part of the programme specifically and it's a whole lot of doctors, somebody curing cancer somebody you know, building a medical device. It felt like if there was a lot of focus on, I would say professional or the academic or doing something with it. (...)

I don't feel necessarily feel that you know I could relate to the people in the room. But also, I was extremely green at that point in time. (...) I had two choices I could be part of the problem and complain about the challenges of the country and the high violent crime or I could be part of the solution and the more that start popping up being part of the solution, the more I got excited, the more I healed, the more I started building stuff and started changing towards a place of everybody in the country faces different challenges. And we have a choice to be part of it. So, I think being my initial sort of engagement was a lot of academics. I literally just started my BA degree. So, I just felt that, you know, they have a lot of, I would say academic experience at that point in time, but not necessarily. I just couldn't relate because I literally just started studying, but the programme opened up a lot more non-academic sort of environments as well (...)

South Africa's got a lot of innovation, especially in the rural areas, there's there's there's a lot of good ideas good but those cases and with the guidance of the programme really valuable, valuable products and solutions can be brought to the market so, but ultimately I think it was just I had a good idea and wanted to change the world, I wanted to get rid of the pain and stop the pain for someone else and at that point in time (...)

- **Reflect on the expectations you had at the very beginning, to what extent did SABII Program meet your expectations?**

To be honest, I didn't know what to expect. I wanted to make the idea work. I didn't know how to go about it at the time. The exposure to international coaches in the likes of the Geordie Montserrat and access to Dorina and just the exposure international coaches and a different approach to the way we think. I think for me the benefit of being exposed to an international coach or mentor mentorship through the programme that is being very valuable in the sense that it validated the idea. It validated that this could be something that could make a bigger impact in South Africa, (..) it's not to say that I didn't believe the local coaches, but it was a different point of view from an international perspective. That said, this is something that can make a bigger difference. So, for me, the expectations were to do well, learn everything I possibly could. So, I just absorbed (..) You know, I just wanted to learn more, and I wanted to engage, and when they when they gave criticism about the idea I didn't take that up as criticism. I took that up as a way to make this better and I practise what they taught us. Like I said, I still use a lot of what we've learned in the first six-month sessions that we've had with both the South African Mentorship programme as well as the Swiss programme on the Swiss side. But it's just very, very valuable. I think that sets a very strong foundation to do well.

- **And were you surprised by the programme?**

Look now, I was because I was so green. I was surprised every single session. I was surprised from starting out a year later, getting to pitch at Google. Just that year, I was every single time amazed at my personal growth. And my personal confidence improved my ability to communicate, my ability to present it to my ability to stand up for what I believe the solution is because sometimes I'll give you an example. Switzerland doesn't face the same challenges as any African country, meaning that things work in Switzerland. The bus is on time. The police come, there's the emergency services, everything works. In South Africa, that's not the case in the sense of the police is not coming if there's an incident. So, the infrastructure is fractured. And so having a perspective from both sides of a country where things work versus a country where there are challenges to make things work and now to be part of the solution really be part of the solution and to really start to really show the world that we can compete globally has not just met my expectations. Like I said in the beginning, I didn't even know what to expect. But now looking back it's well beyond what I could have expected in the start.

- **Did all these happen thanks to the learning that you had in this programme?**

Yeah, the first I would say, I would say that set a very good foundation. The fact that we were navigated to the right type of learning material, we were exposed to the right type of coaching because, you know, I think the combination of how the programme was put together is: learn how to protect your IP, learn how to defend your business case, learn how to present your business. The other big thing is market access and then I think the other one is in the beginning I'm not a financial person, so the financial side of the pitching to investors because every day some, I think one of the coaches, I think it was, Jordy said every day, or every meeting is a pitch. So, so till today I would prepare as if I'm pitching for a \$1,000,000. I think the foundation to practise certain things and continue that has been said for me in, in, in the programme.

- **Which opportunities could you uncover thanks to this participation in SABII programme?**

Well, the biggest the first one: after pitching at Google and having that opportunity gave us international exposure, so since then I've been invited to multiple countries as a key speaker. I've been invited to many panels as industry expert to speak on certain topics. I mean the top of my mind that being invited by the Vienna Embassy to be a speaker at one of the events in Vienna, speaking on a global stage on how we can assist on border safety. I mean it's got nothing to do with my day-to-day what I do, but I'm having the opportunity to say this is what we can do from a technology perspective to enhance border safety. So, I think from the exposure gained through the programme, there you just learn, but then after when you go through the two week the last two weeks of the programme where you I spent time (...). But we were in Lausanne and then we were in Zurich and then we pitched at Google, so the exposure there to deal with other international entrepreneurs. Till today we make contact with

each other; If they need access to market this side it's a phone call away for us. If we need advice or something . So, definitely very valuable. But I think for me the biggest sort of exposure was international companies saw us and listen to our being a key keynote speaker at some of these international events, I was a speaker in Vienna speaking at universities. In Canada, yeah, at the Washington DC, 5 states in North America, as a result of being seen or being seen through being the winner at Google and the media attention it had. And of course, then through the Swiss Embassy in South Africa, we were invited to multiple of events after and had the opportunity to engage with stakeholders and Swiss-based companies. So, we actually signed off first International contract with one of the top three emergency response companies globally as a result of being a speaker in Vienna as an example.

- **What would you say are the biggest benefits of the SABII program?**

I would first say the vision from local to global. I would always say this is the one thing that the programme has given me. It increased my vision from making a local to an international or a global difference. And the structure that the mentor brought; International exposure to other markets. And then I would say the access, not just the access but the mentorship support within the programme and while you're part of the programme, if it's especially in the early stages, that was definitely the things that made you not give up.

- **What would you say was missing in the program? Or what can be changed or improved?**

So, the one thing I would improved is having a shared knowledge base of your learnings. Having a space where other entrepreneurs just starting out has got access to us that paid the price, (...) made mistakes and learn from those mistakes as the ability to advise them and help them with market access. So, like I said in the beginning your business goes through different cycles, you've got your idea finished, your startup phase and your growth. So, we're going into a growth stage now and (..) I think there could be a lot of benefit for the programme to stay connected through every stage of of the project until exit, because that's the potential of each and every business that goes through the.

Part 3: Challenges; interests; needed support

- **To what extent did the program enable you to overcome the challenges you had at the very beginning? Please, explain in detail.**

I would say understanding what you don't do it. It's very tough in the beginning because you've got this idea you want to save the world. You've got this idea and you just want to change the world and the world is not ready for you and this big idea because you're not structured at that point in time. You just want to save lives. But you don't know operationally what is ahead of you. You don't know what this is going to take. You don't know practically what resources do you need at that point in time; How do you put your team together? How do you keep your team together? How to raise funds? Why should other people buy into this idea? Not everybody is as passionate about saving lives as you are, or whatever your idea is, Not everybody is your friend. Not everybody is for your idea, because you can imagine the biggest challenge for us that that we had to realise early on is you are a threat to the market that you are bringing something to the market that says there's a better way to respond. There is a faster way and you're essentially saying those kinds of things and absolutely believing those kind of things puts a threat on the big companies not doing it the better way and therefore putting a lot of obstacles on your path not to make that goal. So, in the beginning, you have so much fuel and passion but that gets very worn out very fast when you start going to market, when you start, you know, knocking on doors when you start facing the real world then you start doubting if you doing the right thing because the people will have a meeting with you and they've got much deeper pockets than you and tomorrow you see a competing product. So you need a lot of character and a lot of strength and a lot of support and once again in the beginning, that is what this programme gives you a lot of support. It's a lot of structure. It's it helps you to or almost not tame but redirect your passion; Redirect the fuel you have and to focus on the right things and to speak to the right audiences, to walk away from business – trying to be everything to everyone because that's, I mean there's a quote saying that it is in a sea of opportunities that entrepreneurs drown. There's so much opportunities out there. Not knowing which ones to take, which ones to leave, those are the things that can make or break a company, make or break an entrepreneur.

- **What are the main challenges for the future development of your company?**

At the moment our biggest challenge is we've reached a state where we've outgrown our current operational capacity. I think the biggest challenge is now knowing when to scale your team, when to scale into certain areas or not to go into certain areas. So, I think you've built so hart between the startup phase and the growth phase that when you reach that growth space, you physically have outgrown the previous stage, and that in itself brings a lot of operational challenges, because suddenly your systems by that time needed to scale already, because in the beginning or between startup phase and growth phase, what you do is you just sort of put more and more customers on your on your plate that you're believable to the

market, you're believable to investors. Like what's happened to us; and then you sign over \$100 million contract and now suddenly you need to deliver. Now some would say that is a great problem to have. It might be so. It is definitely a very stressful problem to have because now you're facing the challenge of potentially not being able to deliver and that is very stressful. So, I think the biggest challenge is from being in the start up and going into growth phase, it's like being between two dress sizes. The one doesn't really fit, but the other one's too big and you know you've shown some confidence within the market. You've shown market that you're starting to tick the right boxes for the right level of investors, but you're not quite there yet. So, you put more on the table so that you're more believable and I think that in itself it's almost also a trap because it puts you under a lot of pressure.

- **How can AIT Swiss - Africa be beneficial to you given the current state of your company and the goals you intend to meet?**

I would say like I said, you know, being part or stay connected throughout sort of the different cycles that a startup goes through and have access to expertise at that specific stage of the company. We're scaling globally now, but we have to set up international structures now. So having the access to the right expertise at the different stages of where the company is at, I think that's also would be beneficial. But I also think that is what lacking because you know you wouldn't get to this stage if you didn't go through a programme, but you don't also want to mess it up in this stage, so having access to the right expertise at the different stages, I would say would be very beneficial.

- **If AIT Swiss - Africa were to organize webinars, which topics and/or speakers would be of value to you?**

Il think market positioning from a growth stage perspective, If I'm sitting in the audience, if the audience is something, if the audience is different. Let's say the audience is people starting out now? That would be different. I would approach it differently, but if I'm part of the audience is, you know, market access and access to some international investors, you know, having access to the next level type of investors to start building relationships with him because for us now, we actually now have closed a funding round with a UK Investor and it would be beneficial to start building relationship with the next phase or the next phase investor or the potential sort of exit type of investors as well.

Part 4: Advice to other Startups

- **What advice do you have for young Startups or people starting their entrepreneurial journey?**

I would say once you've decided on something, your vision is not negotiable, so by that I mean once you've decided on something and a vision, you've got to stay, you've got to back yourself and you've got to back that vision every single day and you don't have the ability, you don't have the option to quit. Once you have the option to quit you, you're going to quit so you don't have the option to quit. You don't have a Plan B, you are plan A2Z. You are everything to the business, so you've got to back yourself. You've got to put in the work to upskill yourself daily continuously. You've got to put in the work. It's not like you go from one stage and now you know every single stage is new. You've got to back yourself even though you don't know everything, you've got to back yourself because you're going to have fierce, fierce opposition throughout this whole journey. So, you've got to back yourself throughout and the way you do it is you decide on the vision, and you don't negotiate on the vision. And you make sure that when there's no one to back you, you are the one that's still backing you.

- **What could you learn from your past failures or the challenges your Startup has faced?**

First of all, the issue is trying to please everyone, and it starts with your team. You need to hire the right people for the right reasons. I think as Africans we want to help people so sometimes. In the name of help you're not helping your business, so I always say to my team the business is like a bank. If we hire people that contributes to the vision that the bank is filling up, the bank increases. But if we hire the wrong people. They are taking withdrawals from our business, from our vision. They become obstacles or they become delays. They become problematic to get to the vision. So, you know, I think the biggest mistake for us was at times hiring the wrong people or we hired the right people, but they weren't placed or in the right position. So as an example. Somebody might be an exceptional engineer, but and they might be due for a really good promotion and but to make them the company CTO because they were phenomenal in what they did, they were due for promotion, due for increase in all of that but that personality should have never been put in a position of leadership. So, I think to be careful on who you allow in your team and then to make sure you grow that team member the right way so that they continue to contribute to your company. So, our biggest challenge was and it remains on top is to make sure we hire the right people especially now on the growth stage as it's very tough to make sure that you find the right combination of people that will carry the culture that will carry the vision forward the way that I as the founder is continuously doing it. So, I think the challenge is hiring the people for the wrong reasons. Don't hire people in the name of help. I think I have the right people. Be tough to say no to friends and family. And it's tough because I mean our business started up as a family business

because it started out of a traumatic family event. But before you know it, you're carrying the load and the business deserves more.

I think one of the best books that provides a little guidance into staying structured and staying focused is *measure what matters*. So instead of being busy is to move to a results driven organisation. Instead of trying to, achieve 100 goals, have 3 meaningful goals and stick to those 3 meaning meaningful goals. Our business is now at a place where we are able to measure every single person and everything we do so, meaning that does it contribute? Does this person contribute? Does what we do contribute to what we need to achieve? Yes or no? We are at a place where it is very well defined to measure everybody's contribution and everything we do. If it's something that we shouldn't do right now, that's not going to contribute to the top three goals of the company then we don't do it and it's a constant daily practise to say we're not doing this because this is this is not going to get us to achieve the goals - the top three goals of the company.