

Building a 'treeevolution'

BY NABELAH FREDERICKS

A TREE planting business started by three friends with no experience in greening communities has become so popular that over the last four years 3 478 volunteers have signed up to plant trees in South Africa and a number of other African countries.

Some volunteers have even covered their own travel costs!

Greenpop began as an idea by 10 friends with no experience in tree planting. All they had was a drive to offset their own carbon footprints by planting 1 000 trees in a month.

Lauren O'Donnell, who founded the business with husband Misha Teasdale and Jeremy Hewitt in 2011, says the organisation has been inundated with calls following the planting of 1 000 trees at various schools in the Cape Flats in Cape Town.

"We received calls from schools asking why we had not planted trees there, when a neighbouring school received trees and businesses contacted us wanting to do the tree-planting as a team-building exercise," says O'Donnell.

She says a key challenge during the business's early days was that the organisation was no typical brand. It was friends with media and marketing backgrounds that helped them align their purpose



Misha Teasdale, Lauren O'Donnell and Jeremy Hewitt started GreenPop in 2011.

with the brand.

"We wanted to make greening popular by targeting everyone so we aligned this and started building our brand," says O'Donnell.

Evident of the brand's growth

is the organisation's social media page numbers which have increased gradually since the business was started.

"We have a good social media following audience of about 28 000 over all the different platforms

and we have people who go onto our website every month," says O'Donnell. Despite leaning on friends' background in marketing, O'Donnell attributes most of this growth to face-to-face marketing.

"We also did guerrilla



Join the online discussion

SOCIAL entrepreneurs have a new platform to learn about successful social enterprises.

This follows the launch of Talking Social Enterprise, an online "talk network", hosted at 7.30pm on a Wednesday evening of each month.

It aims to stimulate debate amongst social enterprise entrepreneurs and is hosted on the Google Hangouts platform.

- To listen to the show, sign-up by registering via www.TalkingSocialEnterprise.net.

marketing in the beginning. We would cycle through traffic with green capes or we would do flash mobs," says O'Donnell. She adds that the business also drew a lot of support because people wanted to be a part of the social enterprise.

"We started at a time when people in South Africa wanted to do something for their country," says O'Donnell. But, doing something for their country came with quite a few challenges.

"We did guerilla marketing. We'd run through traffic with green capes and we also did flash mobs"

"We had staffing challenges because we had no secure revenue and had to rely on volunteers," says O'Donnell. The business also had no vehicles with which to transport the trees. However, O'Donnell says that they were able to overcome these challenges by doing trade exchanges.

"We got a bakkie donated to us in mid-2011 and have built up a consistent income stream to employ people," she says. The business now employs 13 staff and three part-timers and she says over the years it has become relatively easier to do business as the "treeevolution" has become better known.

- For more information, go to www.greenpop.org.

Develop your brand so that it engages your community

BY MARCUS COETZEE

SOCIAL enterprises work hard to develop powerful brands around which they build deeply engaged communities.

These brands act as magnets that attract people and opportunities. This is the 10th principle of our Think like a Social Enterprise series.

A brand is everything that someone experiences about an organisation.

It could be a news article, a Twitter feed, a meeting with staff, a logo or an office suite. It could even be a rumour. It's the combination of the thoughts, pictures, sounds and feelings that you have when you think about an organisation you know.

There are a range of benefits to having a strong and engaging brand.

A strong brand encourages philanthropists, investors, customers and partners to want to be part of your organisation.

For example, Iyeza Express uses cyclists to collect and deliver medicines from local clinics for a small fee. Once Iyeza Express's brand gained the spotlight, it started attracting investors and partners such as Metropolitan Health.



Marcus Coetzee

An engaging brand will also help you get past gatekeepers and access key people.

For example, Impact Hub is a global network of 63 workspaces with 11 000 members.

This movement has significant social impact. When the Impact Hub makes a call or sends an email, it is surprising how quickly people respond.

Having a good brand will also make it easier for you to recruit, inspire and retain competent staff.

There is plenty of research that people would risk money and

job security to work with a brand they love.

For example, Heart Capital invests in social entrepreneurs and helps them scale or franchise their solutions. It has carefully cultivated its brand and designed a volunteer experience that attracts over 100 interns each year.

Finally, if your organisation has an engaging brand people will take notice when you say something. For example, LifeCo UnLtd, featured two months ago in Small Business Connect, came about after a recent merger of two strong brands.

LifeCo has directly educated and impacted over 56 000 adults in South Africa, and UnLtd supports social entrepreneurs. When Pat Pillay from LifeCo UnLtd stands up in a room to say something, everyone pays careful attention.

These examples demonstrate that a brand strategy should be a core component of your organisation's marketing and business strategy.

Developing a powerful brand involves two simple, yet difficult steps.

The first is to work with staff and partners to develop a brand that reflects the magic of what

your organisation is about.

The brand must be based on reality, as people will quickly see through any false image. The second step is to live this brand and ensure that it's reflected in all the decisions, interactions, documentation and communications of your organisation.

Your organisation must be congruent with its brand.

For example, See Saw Do is a social enterprise that transforms spaces where children develop and learn. Staff at the enterprise have helped paint early childhood development centres, decorated classrooms, and undertaken many more such activities.

Design thinking and the well-being of children features in every encounter that people have with this organisation.

Strong brands are powerful magnets that open doors and attract opportunity.

They need to be carefully designed and cultivated over time.

They must be embraced by everything an organisation does. Engaging brands must be lived each day.

- Marcus Coetzee is a strategist specialising in social enterprises.