

**CUT
OUT**
AND KEEP!

MY OWN BOSS

After persuading his ex-boss to sell a major share of the company to him, this self-starter realised his dream of owning a business

BUSINESS PROFILE

NAME Zamo Plates Trading CC
SECTOR Motor Industry
FOUNDED 2009
OWNER Zamo Ndlovu
STAFF Seven

When his boss toyed with the idea of relocating to Cape Town, office manager Zamo Ndlovu jumped at the opportunity to tell him that he was keen to take over the company, which specialised in designing personalised number plates.

"I've been in the business of personalised number plates for over a decade and the thought of working for another boss while I already owned a 15 per cent stake in this business was simply ridiculous," says the 35-year-old father-of-two.

Originally from Pietermaritzburg where he cut his teeth at the local community radio station as a presenter and promotions and marketing manager, Zamo's new interest seemed a far cry from his roots.

"I have an office management certificate from Midlands Community College and also studied labour law at the then University of Natal. These courses and work experiences helped me on the path to entrepreneurship," Zamo explains.

"You need to understand labour laws, computer skills and office management to make it in business."

Zamo moved to Joburg when he was head-hunted by his former boss, Barry Berman, and says he's always regarded himself as a marketing guy. Barry later realised Zamo's potential and skills as a successful entrepreneur and agreed to sell him his 75 per cent stake of the company.

Zamo then re-registered the business as Zamo Plates Trading CC and went from being an employee to an employer.

Although his journey may seem easy, as Zamo explains his challenges and triumphs, it becomes clear that it wasn't.

WHERE I GOT THE IDEA

While working at the KwaZulu-Natal department of transport, I knew I wanted to



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PAY A PROFESSIONAL TO HANDLE YOUR BUSINESS TAX AND OTHER LEGAL MATTERS

– ZAMO NDLOVU, SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESSMAN

be my own boss but I had to learn the ropes from others first so I approached Barry.

He's currently my mentor and business partner and he showed me the ropes. I then started the business based on the overseas idea of sought-after personalised number plates that are auctioned for millions.

I was fortunate to be part of a team that started the personalised number plates at the KZN department of transport. Now I own a company that's based in Mulbarton, Johannesburg that creates personalised number plates throughout the country.

Although we don't have offices in all the provinces, we have reps in KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape.

The core of the business is personalised number plates, but we also license vehicles.

People are misinformed about personalised plates; some think it costs a fortune and it takes forever to get one – we do it within two working days! We check the availability, get them approved and issue the certificate of ownership to the client. If they want a licence as well, we work closely with companies that render that service.

HOW I FINANCED IT

I needed over R300 000 to buy Barry's shares. My savings weren't enough, but I had invested in some unique personalised number plates worth over R50 000 each.

I struck a deal with my former boss and gave him those plates, paid him R60 000 from my savings and agreed to make him a silent partner in my business until I've paid him off fully.

THE FIRST YEAR

It was hard! Dealing with staff – not as the manager of the company, but as the owner – was challenging. Staff members insisted on asking for loans or a salary increase.

I had to deal with the staff's perception that as the owner, I was loaded. I realised that their mindset and attitude towards me had to change.

Getting rid of dead weights and replacing

them with people who were willing to work hard was the toughest thing to do. The first three months were brutal, but I pulled through thanks to my determination, commitment and need to succeed in business.

HOW I MARKET MY BUSINESS

I use print media, such as the Yellow Pages. I also have a website (www.plates.co.za) and use social networking sites. In addition, I regularly visit car dealers and the corporate world to market the business.

I rely heavily on word-of-mouth marketing and I sponsor celebrity personalised number plates for soccer stars Brian Baloyi and Lucas Radebe, model Kerry McGregor, musician Mandoza and many more.

Furthermore, we also erect a stand at motor shows in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

FUTURE GOALS

Short-term: To expand my business and offer the licensing service on a full-time basis for big companies, not only for individuals. **Long-term:** To open offices in other provinces and incorporate traffic fine payments, licensing for individuals and companies and fleet management for companies. I'd like to create jobs and mentor young and upcoming entrepreneurs. □

THE BIGGEST LESSONS I'VE LEARNT

A marketing budget is important for the growth of a business.

Work with trustworthy people who can do the job even in your absence.

Pay creditors on time.

Draw a fixed salary as the boss – even when business is good and save for rainy days.

Don't give loans to staff members if the company can't afford to – you are running a business, not a charity.

Don't be shy to say "No" when you have to.

Never promise more than you can give to a client. Direct them to someone who specialises in what they want; this will create a better working relationship.

* If you've missed previous parts of our entrepreneur series call 021-446-1057 or e-mail archive@drum.co.za

BUSINESS ANALYSIS

We asked enterprise development expert Pam Mashiane from Segakweng & Associates Strategy Consultancy, to assess Zamo's business.

ZAMO'S STRENGTHS

Q Investing back into the business is such a great characteristic to have as an entrepreneur. The fact that Zamo is buying back shares shows he is wise about sustaining his business.

Q He has a fluid market and the fact that he worked for the transport department means that he must have influential networks.

Q Zamo has expertise, knowledge and insight into the industry. He also has qualifications and experience in marketing and promotions, which sets him apart.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Q He needs to come up with a great and unique marketing strategy for his business. He can't rely solely on word-of-mouth advertising and sponsoring celebrities.

Q His business needs to be more visible.

Q He has to be aware that he has a highly specialised market, which needs specialised marketing strategies.

VERDICT

Zamo's business has a sustainable operating model and there's growth for branching out into related products and services. He is already providing added value in terms of licensing. My advice is to think of more innovative value-added services within the industry.

ZAMO'S TOP TIP

Learn from other people's mistakes, but only implement what you know will work for your business.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS?

SMS BUSINESS and your question to 32113. Each SMS costs R1. You can also write to us at DRUM Entrepreneurs, PO Box 7167, Roggebaai 8012 or send a fax to 021-406-2937 marked for the attention of DRUM Entrepreneurs. E-mail us at business@drum.co.za

