

WhatsOnSale at the virtual mall?

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Jalome Chirwa, a student at the University of the Witwatersrand and in partnership with the Innovation Hub, The Tshimologong Precinct and his two partners, Emmanuel Mareme and Milaan Mashele have developed WhatsOnSale, a web and mobile platform aimed at the retail industry.

We chat with the trio to find out more about their entrepreneurial journey...

■ ***Can you tell us about WhatsOnSale?***

Milaan: WhatsOnSale is a mobile app aimed at the youth that aims to create a virtual mall experience.

Users have access to the latest brand promotions and the ability to socially interact with these promotions. The goal is to ensure that users are kept informed about offerings from their favourite brands.

Our vision is to be a consistently innovative brand advertising platform that ensures that retailers get as much audience to their promotions as possible and that their customers have full access to the event of any promotion present.

■ ***When, how and why did you get started***

Jalome: The team came about in March of 2018 when Milaan Mashele and Emmanuel Mareme approached me at the Tshimologong Precinct after the launch of an app that I had previously worked on.

The guys approached me with the idea of building what they described to be a virtual mall. An app with that could offer users the ability to engage with the latest retail specials.

The idea was initially that of Milaan and Emmanuel after having conducted a survey on youth purchasing and brand loyalty, which included student participants from the university and other individuals around the Braamfontein area.

The two noticed that participants who liked a particular brand or retailer were keen to keep up with the news about the brand/retailer or a specific product from the brand/retailer, however, some participants would use several resources such as specific brand websites and blogs to keep up to date with promotions and others would wander into a store or mall and realise that certain items are on special.

This then led to the virtual mall idea of which is WhatsOnSale.

■ ***What is the core function of WhatsOnSale***

Jalome: The core functionality of WhatsOnSale is “honouring brand loyalty”. This is done specifically at 3 levels. At a brand, product, and store level.

We honour brand loyalty at a brand level by offering users the ability to keep up to date with all promotions from their favourite brands/retailers.

We honour brand loyalty at a product level by offering users the ability to keep up to date with news and promotions of a



Jalome Chirwa

particular product from their favourite brands/retailers.

We honour brand loyalty at a store level by offering users the ability to locate the nearest physical stores that offer current specials from their favourite brands/retailers.



Emmanuel Mareme and Mlaan Mashele

■ ***What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?***

Emmanuel: Our biggest challenge over the past year has been funding. After having developed our prototype, we went on the quest to acquire funding to launch our beta testing phase and also acquire office space and mentorship.

We managed to acquire office space and mentorship through an incubation programme offered by the Innovation Hub after having demonstrated our prototype and our goal for the future, however funding for the app proved to be more difficult to acquire and after not being able to obtain funding from local institutions. We later reached out to an American consulting firm, Mutualism, who have shown interest to invest in our product.

■ ***What would you like to see changed in the South African startup landscape?***

Emmanuel: Our biggest challenge over the past few years as a startup has been funding as previously mentioned. From our perspective, we believe this is an issue for most startups in South Africa.

With that being said, we hope that startups will soon have easier access to funds to both grow and test their ideas in the market.

■ ***What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?***

Milan: If you have any idea, implemented, failure is very much part of the process, so do expect it and in doing so you never know what you might stumble upon, who you might meet or what you might pivot towards.

■ ***What has been your proudest achievement thus far?***

Emmanuel: Our most significant achievements and by far our proudest has to be our partnerships with institutions such as Mutualism, The Wits Enterprise and The Wits Tshimologong Precinct that has enabled us to continue on our journey

through their ongoing consultation and support.

▣ ***What does the future of entrepreneurship look like to you?***

Jalome: With technology constantly evolving, we believe that the future of entrepreneurship will soon revolve around technology and we believe this will result in innovative and creative solutions to the problems we face in modern-day Africa.

▣ ***What do you think is the importance of a startup accelerator?***

Milaan: We believe that the existence of startup accelerators is of paramount importance. WhatsOnSale would have not been possible if it weren't for startup accelerators such as The Wits Tshimologong Precinct and The Innovation Hub. These entities played a huge role by connecting us with other like-minded entrepreneurs, funding institutions, offering consulting services and providing us with a cohesive workspace. We believe most startups will find the support of a startup accelerator very beneficial.

▣ ***What do you believe are the traits an entrepreneur needs to succeed?***

Jalome: To achieve your desired business success it is essential that you remain motivated and determined, 90% of startups are doomed to fail according to Forbes and in order to be a part of that 10%, perseverance is key.

What's also essential as an entrepreneur is the ability to work with others. Building a successful business will require you having to source the skills of others and being able to respect, appreciate and work with other individuals will go a long way.

▣ ***Tell us about your biggest struggles as entrepreneurs as well as some major highlights?***

Milaan: Our biggest struggle as mentioned was funding. We had spent months and months pitching to one investor and another. When we eventually acquired funding, this was our first major obstacle conquered. This meant we could continue developing and growing our business, then came our strategic partnerships which facilitated our legal issues, financial projections and providing us with mentorship through our entrepreneurial journey.

▣ ***Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?***

Emmanuel: From our experience of being entrepreneurs, we believe that entrepreneurship is crucial to job creation and development of other businesses. In startup accelerators, you get to meet like-minded entrepreneurs and collaborations form from that, which contributes to the development of these entrepreneurs and their businesses through the exchange of ideas and skill.

▣ ***Where do you want to see WhatsOnSale in the next five years?***

Jalome: In the next 5 years we would like to see more strategic partnerships, specifically with major retail brands such as Edcon, retail stores such as Shoprite and brands such as Coca-Cola, Mofaya and many more.

Averaging 100 daily sign-ups onto the platform is also a goal for the next 5 years. Researching foreign retail markets is also on the agenda for our 5-year plan.

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