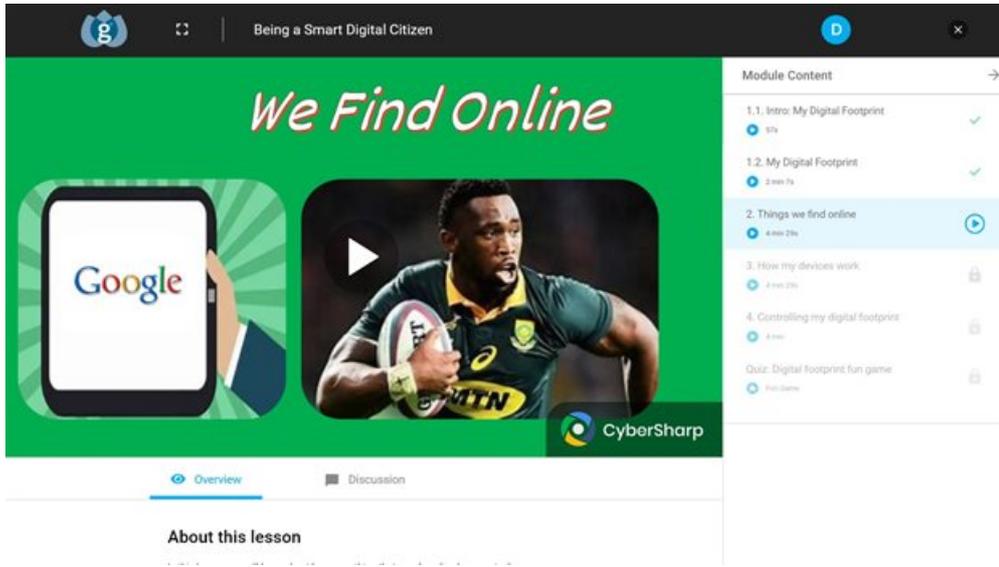


Creating cyber-savvy kids with CyberSharp

By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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Anyone under the age of 25 doesn't remember a life without the internet and cellphones. Whether in our homes or schools, they have become an integral part of our lives for communication, education and, of course, social interaction. But with all their benefits, also comes the unexpected or unseen threats - especially for our children.



"You don't have to scroll down too far on your newsfeed before coming across a headline where badly thought through online or social media behaviour had catastrophic outcomes and consequences," says Susan Moerdyk, marketing manager of the start-up CyberSharp, an e-learning platform aimed at educating schools and families to be cyber-smart.

"Apart from the sensationalist newsfeeds about cyberbullying and inappropriate sexual content, there are the less publicised areas of impaired cognitive development, interpersonal skills and emotional maturity stemming from over-exposure to screens in general," Moerdyk continues.

"The increasing incidence of depression, social isolation, sleep deprivation and generally lower self-esteem, due to comparisons with other social media users, are prevalent among developing prepubescents and teenagers.

"However, it is not all doom and gloom," she says. "Managed correctly, there are many benefits if we positively empower our children, as it is a vital aspect of teenagers and children's social lives."

As part of Bizcommunity's Entrepreneurship Month, we chat to the founders of CyberSharp, Dominic Moerdyk and Steve Pratt about the company's creation and their entrepreneurial journey so far...



CyberSharp founders, Steve Pratt and Dominic Moerdyk

▣ ***Tell us a bit about CyberSharp and what the company provides...***

CyberSharp's holistic solution equips schools and families to be safe and smart online. We are all about creating smart digital citizens. The platform includes a cutting-edge e-learning platform and is aimed at educating schools and families to be safe and smart when interacting on social media and navigating the online world in general. Furthermore, the solution includes value-added services from industry experts around legal advice, accredited counselling, school insurance and an incident reporting channel.

Our platform is aimed at three main audiences, as we hope to encourage parents to be more involved with their children's online behaviour:

- Learners → Fun and informative learning modules
- Educators → Teacher guides
- Parents → Resources and tips

The learning modules are customized, with age appropriate content, covering critical areas of relevance and importance from Grades 0-12.

▣ ***What was the driving factor for the creation of CyberSharp?***

The idea initially stemmed from us as parents being somewhat panicked. This, as a result of our lack of knowledge when it came to protecting and even educating our children around all things social media related. The appreciation that their worlds are completely different to the one in which we grew up made us recognise that we need to consciously and continuously guide them around what is responsible and acceptable behaviour in the online space.

Although a plethora of schools are really making a concerted effort to address this issue by hosting parent and learner workshops, we realised that the education needs to be constant. Just think about how often we must remind our children to say 'please' and 'thank you', or even taking their plates to the sink after a meal. In the same light, we need to continuously remind our children, regardless of age, about good digital citizenship. It really is about instilling good habits from the outset through ongoing education, rather than doing this through fear or isolated occasions.

▣ ***As a new business, what are some of the challenges you've had to deal with getting started and how did you overcome them?***

All of our challenges have resulted in really creative problem solving and skills utilisation.

Firstly, we are creating a new curriculum with information disseminated through a new digital platform. This has come with challenges to create a robust platform that will be scalable on a limited start-up budget. The key challenge was finding the right technology platform that supported our vision; after some challenges we realised that off-the-shelf software was not going to deliver what CyberSharp ideally needed to fulfil our vision. We ultimately took the plunge and developed our own bespoke e-learning platform specifically tailored to a schools' environment. We realise that we will massively benefit from making this key decision as it will allow us to seamlessly grow.

Another challenge has been to ensure the correct partnerships with industry experts to make the platform truly holistic and credible. These being content creators, legal entities, insurance and counsellors with the same positive ideologies as ours.

As schools are under pressure to keep fees as low possible, we needed to demonstrate the value of the platform while positioning the solution so that the cost to the parent is negligible. Thus, for as little as a cup-of-coffee a month per learner, each school can partner with us to ensure the online safety and development of children and their parents.

▣ ***What has been the initial reaction to the start-up?***

The reaction from educators and parents has been refreshingly positive, as both entities recognise the need for this subject of education. The most exciting part of this journey has been to recognise just how committed the educators are in doing their absolute best for our children.

The main message we get when visiting a school to introduce CyberSharp is “We need this.... And... we want this!”

▣ ***Where do you see the company in five years?***

The ideal would be to have CyberSharp omnipresent in as many schools as possible to ensure our vision of creating smart digital citizens. We would like to be the platform of choice for not only social media education, but in time we see the business making a difference in many areas that are non-core to school curriculum. We'd like to expand into the rest of Africa, as well as other international markets, over the next 3 to 5 years.

▣ ***How important do you feel it is to be introduced to entrepreneurship and innovation at educational level?***

We believe that entrepreneurship is the key to the future generation's way of working, particularly in the space of technology. We are repeatedly exposed to the idea that the jobs our children will ultimately fill do not currently exist. Globally, as well as locally, the workplace paradigm has changed to such an extent that the new workforce needs to be equipped to be agile and creative to ensure income streams which support the absolute need for flexible work environments. Even in the corporate or institutional space, staff will be working in more of an outcome-based way and be more flexible with their time and work spaces. We need to innovate to be relevant!

▣ ***What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs just starting out?***

Enjoy the journey and always keep the destination in mind. You will encounter new challenges on an almost daily basis. But the journey is your own, which makes every challenge worth overcoming. It forces creativity and lateral thinking. It is just important to first clearly define your goal, and then to work towards that without getting side-tracked. Surround yourself with a team of like-minded, enthusiastic people and feed off each other's energy.

Make sure your business model is viable and scalable but *do not* make the sole purpose of the business about generating money. Rather consider the difference that you are going to make when it's a success.

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