

Serial entrepreneur dares to dream

Africa Holdings embarks on building a continental empire

Dynamic and successful entrepreneur Tariku Bogale (33) is the driving force behind Africa Holdings, a company he single-handedly launched, developed and grew. It is a multifaceted company comprising the Johannesburg Shopping Centre, Self-Help.co.za, Travel Click, Sikhona Forex, Lions Entertainment, TravelStoreMaker.co.za and VoiceBlast.biz.

As founder and director of the above companies, Bogale has demonstrated extensive experience in business development and leadership acumen. He launched his vision for Africa Holdings, trading as Abyssinia Business and Property Investment, in 2004.

"I saw an opportunity to lease commercial properties in the central business district of Johannesburg to sublet," he confirms. "The property business in South Africa was booming, and city centres are the core of commercial activity in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa. By investing in these hubs of economic development, South Africa and Africa as a whole was set to soar."

Bogale set up TravelClick.co.za, a travel agency, in 2006, trading as Sikhona Travel and Tourism. Later, the name changed to Travel Click in accordance with ever changing trends of 21st century travel needs.

"The company currently grosses R9.6-million per annum," he says.



Tariku S. Bogale

"I realised there were (and still are) no other travel agencies in the heart of the Johannesburg CBD, which enabled me to launch a very niche product, catering to an untapped market."

With its primary focus on corporate companies, Travel Click has since won several awards between 2008 and 2010, conferred on it by some airlines for its sales excellence. An example is its Certificate of Appreciation from Ethiopian Airlines, for Best Performer of the Year 2008/09. "This was a significant achievement, since we had only launched in 2006," Bogale says with pride.

A year later, he developed the first online travel booking engine and management tool, which has the ability to service multinationals and multilingual clientele. This product is set to be unleashed in the corporate market in 2013, and will enable easy access to the company's services via the Internet – around the clock.

"The aim of this facility is to manage corporate companies' travel needs in-house, using my very simplified system, which effectively eliminates the corporations' need for a separate travel agency, while according them savings of up to 35% on costs," Bogale explains.

Africa Holdings embarked on its expansion route in 2008 and launched Sikhona Forex, a foreign exchange office. Bogale realised a need for such a service at Durban's uShaka Marine World, a major tourist attraction that receives in excess of 350 000 visitors monthly.

He noted at the time that despite the large number of tourists at the venue, there were no foreign exchange services available. "I thought that this would be relatively easy to establish. But it took five years before getting a licence to operate a foreign exchange company," he says.

Sikhona Forex received its official letter of appointment from the South African Reserve Bank to act as an 'authorised dealer in foreign exchange with limited authority' in 2010. Its main services include assisting corporate clients, individuals and tourists with retail foreign exchange transactions.

In 2011, Bogale sold his majority shareholding in Sikhona Forex to Sean Maloney, the former chief executive officer of Travelex and founder of FX Africa, in order to devote more time to developing the Johannesburg Shopping Centre in the heart of the CBD. Bogale remains, however, the CEO of Sikhona Forex.

Dual Investment (Pty) Ltd, trading as Johannesburg Shopping Centre, was established in 2009, as the biggest renewal project in the CBD. It comprises shops, stores and offices let by Africa Holdings, which manages and maintains the building and all other properties attached to it.

Bogale also owns Stokal Property, an entity he bought to expand the Johannesburg Shopping Centre.

"In future, I plan to expand this concept to other areas like central Durban. It is a very successful idea that can be taken to other cities, in a bid to woo lower and middle-income earners," he confides. "They are also ideal locations for start-up entrepreneurs to base their operations."

VoiceBlast.biz is an industry-leading voice and mobile marketing solutions provider. "This is a very successful international product with a billion clients worldwide," notes Bogale. It is similar to receiving an SMS, but the consumer receives a voice message that can be adapted by the brand to convey any type of information.

"The client using the VoiceBlast.biz system is also able to target personalised bulk messages to consumers, and is in a position to deduce whether his/her message was delivered, to whom and for how long," he explains.

Self-Help.co.za was launched in 2007 as a self-service terminal for consumers to purchase airline tickets and make hotel bookings. Its cutting-edge technology is designed for application-specific terminals that provide solutions for various industries including retail, finance, hospitality, tourism, healthcare, government, gaming and entertainment, hospitals, restaurants, financial services and ticketing.

"My vision was to integrate self-service into my online booking engine, Travel Click

by placing terminals inside shopping centres. This enables consumers walking past to easily book tickets," Bogale says.

TravelStoreMaker.co.za technology powers thousands of travel websites, including those of airlines, travel agencies, hotels, corporations and web portals. "The flexible and user-friendly technology provides the information and booking capabilities required to book flights, hotels rooms and rental cars via the Web," he adds.

Africa Holdings owns Lions Entertainment, a tavern in the Johannesburg CBD, and its business unit offers a wide range of professional services including research undertaken for the United States Agency for International Development to provide the Ethiopian government with expertise on how to compete with South Africa when it comes to exports.

Its service offering includes analysing the competitiveness of local and international industries; providing macro-economic services; assessing the developmental impact of large projects; supporting government economic modelling of the future; dissembling research results, and providing institutional representation.

The roots

Born in Ethiopia in 1979, Bogale had a lonely childhood, as by the age of eight his parents had divorced and he and his 13 siblings had to learn the ways of the world much earlier. This inspired him to dare to dream at a very young age. He put himself through school in Ethiopia, spurred by his strong belief in education.

"It was a very hard life and I knew I had to push for change within myself if I was going to make it," he says.

By the age of 17, Bogale had his first foray into business, opening Tariku Computer Systems in Ethiopia. He moved to Kenya to pursue a teaching career, which he did for a while prior to settling down in South Africa in 2000.

"I ended up in the Johannesburg CBD, where I started putting my IT [information technology] skills into practice, fixing computers to raise money for a computer course," he reveals.

It was not long before Bogale had diversified his interests and skills, becoming a successful

property broker and developing a successful business model never before tried in South Africa.

Persistence and sheer determination gradually paid off for Bogale, for whom patience is a virtue. This trait was demonstrated by his month-long adventurous road trip from Johannesburg to Addis Ababa – a feat that ranks as one of his "greatest personal achievements to date".

"I've had my ups and downs, both in my personal and business life, but risk and hard work are ingredients for success," says the father of two who enjoys going to the gym, watching movies and reading books on positive thinking and business.

"I have always believed in education. Even though I already have a successful business empire behind me, I yearn for more knowledge in order to constantly improve myself," Bogale adds.

For now, his sights are firmly set on maintaining the success of his business interests.

Bogale is currently in discussions with the Ethiopian government to build a R800-million shopping complex in Piazza, Addis Ababa. This would be that country's first mega shopping complex, one to include retail outlets, a banking hall, hotel and corporate office park.

"I have already identified the 36 000 square metre piece of land on which to build the complex, and aim to construct a bus and taxi terminus within close proximity to it," he says.

"We are currently seeking ambitious investors keen on realising Africa's potential, and who are looking to get into the lucrative African market."

In addition, Bogale is eyeing property in Ghandi Square, Johannesburg, with the intention to develop.

"I am currently in discussions with the property owners to negotiate purchase of a building to the tune of R50-million," he adds.

The secret to Bogale's success is summed up by his lack of fear for failure. "I'm young and I have failed a few times already in my life, but you have to take risks if you want to succeed at anything and maintain the status quo," says the serial entrepreneur who was nominated for African Pioneer in October 2005.