

Double Apex Media

By  Jessica Tennant

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Sudhir "Banzai" Matai, founder and managing editor of Double Apex, previous associate editor at *Car Magazine*, tells us how his online store for motoring-themed T-shirts turned into an automotive media portal.



Following his retrenchment last year, coupled with his passion for anything four-wheeled, he decided to use his knowledge and 15 years of experience in the field to pursue his own endeavour. Since launching earlier this year, the site has accumulated more than 65,000 views and 33,000 unique users to date.

Matai tells us more about the journey so far and how he plans to grow both sides of the business, in building a holistic brand...

How did this come about?

The clothing label actually pre-dates the website. I used to see all these really cool, sometimes funny, motoring-themed T-shirts for sale online in the UK and USA. The problem was, to get them landed here in SA cost more than it was worth, so I decided to do it myself. I used my knowledge of the field to create unique designs aimed at petrolheads. Initially we were using social media to market the clothing, but when we launched the website the marriage of the two felt natural.

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I really enjoy receiving freshly printed shirts from the printer, this is the fruition of months of work people don't see. From design conception through several tweaks (because I want perfection) to finalising the motif, advertising the new products online hoping to gain several hundred orders (as if), noting orders and determining total print run with the aim of reducing the per unit cost, finding a T-shirt worthy of our brand and scraping together the dosh to buy the blanks, waiting ages for the printer because you're a little fish all driven by countless phone calls and emails and FINALLY a finished @dblaxsa product. #dblax #dblaxsa #doubleapex #sizematters #proudlysouthafrican #petrolhead #t-shirts #tshirts #shiftworkersunion #carguy #motorhead

A post shared by [Banzai Matai](#) (@banzaimatai) on Mar 11, 2018 at 12:02am PST

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■ **What are your core differentiators?**

I'd say that the core differentiators are the fact that no one else is producing these items locally, certainly not with the slant we give our products. We see ourselves as a brand petrolheads can relate to and express their passion through. Non-car enthusiasts don't understand the passion that consumes petrolheads, but our designs speak right to their very nature. We pride ourselves on being customer-centric and select only quality items and suppliers to work with. If we produce something, it must be something we would be proud to wear.

■ **What barriers have you had to overcome in launching Double Apex?**

On the clothing side, it's quite interesting. People are still hesitant to shop online. South Africans still want to touch and feel items they are buying, which is not a bad thing.

On the media portal side, it has taken some time and effort convincing the motor manufacturers that we are worthy of

attending events and obtaining test vehicles to review. With each passing week, our audience numbers grow and companies are recognising the value that specialised online portals offer their brands.

▣ **What are some of your short- and long-term goals for the business?**

For one, I would like to see the site grow in terms of traffic. Building a loyal audience whom you can engage with is what the online space is about. Considering we only started a few months ago, I think we're doing okay. I'll know Double Apex is doing well when advertisers start to contact us instead of the other way around. In the longer term, it'll be great to get to the point where Double Apex grows from being a small startup to being able to employ a few people – journalists, photographers, videographers... I'd really like to do more video content, but I won't compromise on the quality of the output. Good video costs and we're not at the point to invest in such niceties... yet.

On the apparel side of things, the short-term plan is to increase brand awareness nationally. We have a good product but we just don't have enough exposure. Whenever new people see the products, they love it and order two to three items at a time. But it seems as though we're still seen as a Cape-based brand. I'd much rather be considered a South African label. There are plenty of petrolheads in other parts of SA who we want to connect with.

▣ **What has been your most notable learning so far?**

On the clothing side, there is one motto we live by: 'don't compromise quality'. It was a challenge to find quality products and suppliers and, as a startup, suppliers in the clothing industry don't take you seriously, but we have found suppliers who match our ethos and requirements. We are building an aspirational brand, one that we want our customers to be as proud of wearing as we are of producing. We have a growing loyal customer base that has bought a T-shirt each time we have released a new design, so we must be doing something right.

“ From the media side, we have learnt that people are very friendly when you can offer them something. But that friendliness soon disappears if you can't. ”

We have also learned that the online space requires loads of work, more so than most people realise. You really have to stay on top of the news cycles and trends to be relevant.

▣ **Proudest achievements to date?**

The idea to start my own motoring clothing label had been lingering in my mind for some time, but there was always something else to focus on. In 2015, I decided to bite the bullet and go for it. I commissioned a few designs and started to investigate printing options. When I received the first batch of shirts from the printer, I was so excited! It was a really big moment. And right then, I knew that we had a winner on our hands.

At first, sales comprised mainly of my local car-guy network but when people we didn't know started ordering our products, it was a real indication of what we had hoped to achieve. Whenever we see car enthusiasts, guys and girls, walking around racetracks in SA sporting Double Apex, I feel an immense sense of pride. We are connecting petrolheads through our unique and often quirky designs and slogans, building a community of people who can now share their passion with other like-minded people.

For the media site, we were very happy the day we received our first invite to a new vehicle launch. That happened only a few weeks after we started the site. It showed that people had taken note of Double Apex, and realised its value in the automotive space and its future potential.

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

That's a tricky one. For years, we kept hearing that print was dead, but local titles were still doing well. I think that the slide for printed titles took a little longer to affect the SA market than it did abroad. We've seen the worst of it in the local context over the last two years or so, with a decline in sales of major titles, costing many people (such as me) their jobs.

“ I think we'll see more movement of qualified, seasoned jourmos into the online space. The fly-by-nighters and chancers will fall by the wayside as proper journalism takes root on the web. There is so much info out there at the

moment, not all of it correct or relevant, so we still need reliable, well-researched stories from people who know what they are talking about and who can convey messages clearly. ”



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■ Next steps? What are your focus areas for 2019?

2018 was all about establishing the portal. In 2019 we plan to grow both sides of the business, building a holistic brand. We're currently in discussions with a well-known local digital agency to represent us in terms of advertising. Right now we're still a startup, but I want the company to grow into an independent, successful business.

We have launched a new collection of T-shirts for the summer season and we have a few more lined up for early next year. We're also investigating the option of selling via a large international marketplace, which could really open up the world for us.

For more, go to DoubleApex.co.za.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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