

How one small business secured a coveted contract with Shoprite Checkers

By [Terrena Rathanlall](#)

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It could not be further from the truth that the Instagram story about the businessman with the flashy car and mansion in the background is a realistic depiction of entrepreneurship, and you could be forgiven for thinking this.



Nigel and Christynn Jacobs, founders of Jacobs Jam | image supplied

What no one tells you about entrepreneurship is that success does not happen overnight, your family will probably call you crazy (and not behind your back) and you will want to quit.

These are things Nigel and Christynn Jacobs know all too well. For the past four years, they have been steadily building their business - Jacobs Jam in the lush Ceres valley and growing their reputation as the only pomegranate jam manufacturer in the world. Recently, they signed a lucrative contract with Shoprite Checkers, and they are now in talks to export their jam.

It sounds like they are living every entrepreneur's dream. Remove the Instagram lens and you will notice the hard work behind the scenes: the Shoprite deal took three years of engagement and discussion, they had to comply with strict, expensive compliance and they did not take home a salary for almost two years.

“After three years of knocking on the door, we are finally listed at Checkers stores in the Western Cape. It is a pilot launch via the newly established Shoprite Next Capital SME development department. Based on the successful off-take we could soon be listed nationally. The Shoprite Checkers team has been phenomenal in their support of our small business. Our jam is also sold at around 300 independent outlets, including select Super Spar stores,” says a proud Nigel Jacobs.

“It’s been a long journey and we are just getting started. I grew up in Mitchells Plain and my wife Christynn’s hometown is Hawston in the Western Cape. We both had humble beginnings and I had to work several jobs to put myself through university.”

It should come as no surprise then that Jacobs Jam has a strong social impact on Ceres. They employ mostly women and youth and provide valuable training for unskilled workers in rural areas where jobs are desperately needed. “We want to empower from within, to give opportunities to people that may not have the same opportunities at bigger businesses.

“In addition, we donate jam to NGOs who run feeding schemes for vulnerable people. We are environmentally conscious and have a no-waste target. Our packaging items are recyclable and upcycled, and we buy from recycling centres,” says Nigel.



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The transition from having successful careers in the corporate world to starting their business took a few years. They registered Jacobs Jam in May 2018, resigned from their jobs to run the business full-time in 2019 and have not looked back since.

“Having our own business has given us the creative freedom to build our brands and put our heritage on display.”

“But entrepreneurship has also taught us difficult lessons; patience is one of them. You are always at the back of the line as a small business. It takes time to get to the front of the line.

“Applying for funding is one of the hardest things any small business owner will do: one application takes between three to five months. Then funders would string us along for months, only for the deal to fall through, sometimes after as long as eight months – we had nothing to show for all that time, money and effort.”

These challenges forced them to develop a resilient mindset, to take it one day at a time and celebrate every win. This mentality helped them build a factory during lockdown, go up against established brands and get their product onto supermarket shelves even after the political instability that followed the 2021 riots.

Last year, Nigel and Christynn won the Entrepreneur of the Year Award at the Western Cape Entrepreneurship Recognition Awards, a testament to their determination to succeed and willingness to learn from their mistakes.

Despite the harsh reality that 70 to 80% of businesses in South Africa fail within the first five years, entrepreneurial training has been proven to be one of the best contributors to success. Jacobs Jam is a participant in Fetola’s Social Entrepreneurship.

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