

The story of Wukina, and how the pandemic failed to snatch its weave

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*Outdoor media owner Tractor Outdoor's **#20in21 SME initiative** was born out of a desire to support South Africa's small and medium businesses (SMEs) that were dealt a blow by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, Tractor Outdoor celebrates its 20th birthday, and thus aims to give 20 qualifying SMEs a marketing boost via its nationwide outdoor media network, with a total media value of R8m, helping these businesses increase top of mind awareness. This is the story of Wukina, one of the beneficiaries of Tractor's #20in21 SME initiative.*

Co-founded by Maureen Sibanda, Wukina is South Africa's first hair networking company that empowers women to earn an income by selling high-quality Brazilian and Peruvian wigs from home.

The business model is based on a commission incentive: Wukina's members earn 20% on every sale they make to their customers, providing them with the opportunity to grow their own business, while establishing an additional revenue stream. "Our unique business model encourages entrepreneurship, while offering guidance, resources and a sense of community to its members: female business owners.



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"Think of it as Africa's Avon for hair," laughs Sibanda.

Sibanda explains that one of the main advantages of Wukina is that its members do not need to invest capital in order to start earning an income. Customers purchase directly from the member's website, and Wukina ships the product and pays the member the commission owing. "This is particularly attractive to those considering embarking on a new venture," says Sibanda, "as high quality wigs tend to be on the pricier side."

The arrival of Covid-19 thwarted all of Sibanda's best laid plans for her promising young business. "A key marketing and new member recruitment channel was our outdoor activations, and when lockdown was announced in March 2020, we had to relook our growth model."

Wukina rapidly shifted the bulk of its marketing efforts to social and digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp and Google Adwords. However, as an e-commerce business, it found itself unable to make deliveries until South Africa entered Level 3, "which impacted the trust between the customer and our brand," explains Sibanda.

However, with consumers facing pay cuts, job losses and worried about their future thanks to the pandemic, South Africans were actively seeking alternative sources of income, and Wukina was able to recruit over 1,500 new members during the challenging lockdown period. This exponential growth in its network helped expand the business, reaching new potential customers.



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Sibanda says that while unit sales are increasing once again, supply chain issues prevail and a number of products remain unavailable. "We have also seen a shift towards lower priced units, which is indicative of the tough economic conditions experienced by many South Africans."

Sibanda explains that Wukina's biggest challenge remains brand visibility. "We are competing with other hair retailers that have been in the industry for decades, and gaining brand exposure as a new business is difficult and expensive."

As a beneficiary of Tractor Outdoor's #20in21 SME initiative, Wukina will receive billboard exposure across the media owner's extensive outdoor network, as well as PR, social and digital promotion. Sibanda believes that this package will go a long way towards getting her brand in front of potential members and customers.

"Our members love the service that we offer as it empowers them to work for themselves, and through this partnership with Tractor, we are provided with the opportunity to increase our brand prominence, which, in turn, will help grow our business significantly," she concludes.

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