

# be.first aims to help you buy better



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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be.first is a mobile app that allows you to find and share product recommendations in a single place. It's a completely free app that's built around a community of sharers and discoverers.

Co-founded by two moms who both left the corporate world to live a more balanced life and have the flexibility to be with their young kids and at the same time pursue their dreams of creating a business that provides real value in people's lives.

We chat to Dishi Smit and Keri Stewart, co-founders of be.first, to find out more about the growing community who connects by celebrating, sharing and inspiring each other in a single place...



Dishi Smit and Keri Stewart, co-founders of be.first

## ■ Can you tell us a bit about be.first?

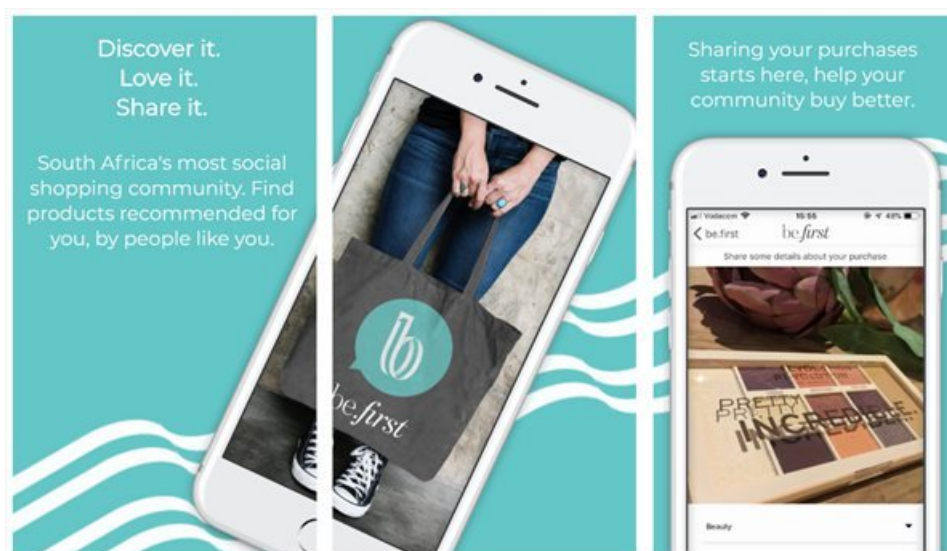
be.first is a way to find and share product and service recommendations in a single place. It's a completely free app aimed at helping people buy better. Real people post products and services they have had a good experience with, this then becomes an authentic and reliable way in which people can find what works. In addition, we curate current deals so that the community can easily find them on be.first.

## ■ When, how and why did you get started?

The idea was born in November 2018. We partnered with a development company called Open Vantage and it took only four months to build the first version of be.first. After having friends and family, as well as an additional group of people, test the app, it was launched in July 2019 to the rest of the country.

We took to social media initially to start creating our intention around buying better and to introduce our brand personality to our potential audience. This quickly led us see who our core users were going to be and what the acceptance of the offering would be.

We love that most of our growth has been organic which means there is a real need for recommendations from real people, it confirmed that with a growing e-commerce market locally and globally, there has never been a bigger search for authenticity around purchases.



One of our shared goals is to serve our community, so we sought out to create something that we knew would be helpful, something that would be a positive space where people could share what's worked for them.

We knew as women that we all at some point in the day ask a colleague, a friend, a family member - where did you buy that shirt, shoes, pram, foundation from... or what are you making for dinner tonight? We knew that women spend way too much time trying to find what works, how to save or where to shop. We knew that there had to be a way to share this information so that it could help more than just that one woman (or man). This is why *be.first* was born.

#### ■ **What is the core function of *be.first*?**

To help people buy better by offering real recommendations from real people as well as supplying our users with tips and tools on where, how and when to shop. We're also driving the conversation around social pressure of buying and getting to the core of why people buy what they buy.

#### ■ **What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?**

Having a limited budget, lack of capital is a startup killer. Learning how to be everything in a business is overwhelming, to say the least, we've had to adopt a test and learn culture putting us completely out of our comfort zone. Prioritising the 'right thing to do' in terms of getting users or perfecting the product. Our culture is to have everything at once which usually robs you of a critical lesson or makes what you're offering unsustainable, it's a tricky balance of being perfect or making progress.

#### ■ **What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?**

Figure out your passion, it usually leads you to your purpose. Do the groundwork to test your idea and take calculated risks along the way. Have a good support structure of people that have been through the startup journey. Read anything and everything relevant to your product, industry and from opinion leaders that resonate with you.

■ ***What has been your proudest achievement thus far?***

The very launch of be.first was a proud moment - often people don't start because they are too focussed on the end goal.

“ We've learned to celebrate every milestone regardless of how small it may seem outwardly. We're not attached to a specific outcome, we're focussed on creating value through every interaction, this has led to many achievements in our last year because of the bite-size goals we set for ourselves. ”

■ ***What does the future of entrepreneurship look like to you?***

In our line of work, we're constantly exposed to mom-and-pop type establishments, in the search for authenticity we believe there will be more and more people looking to create niche products and services that will attract more and more customers. We hope the trend we're seeing continues as more people look for a better work/life balance.

■ ***What do you think is the importance of startup accelerator/incubator programmes?***

We love that more companies are starting to see the importance of developing these programmes. Depending on where you are in your startup journey it could really fast track your business, that said choosing the right programme is as important as choosing the right business partner, make sure it aligns with where you are in your learning curve.

■ ***What would you like to see changed in the South African startup landscape?***

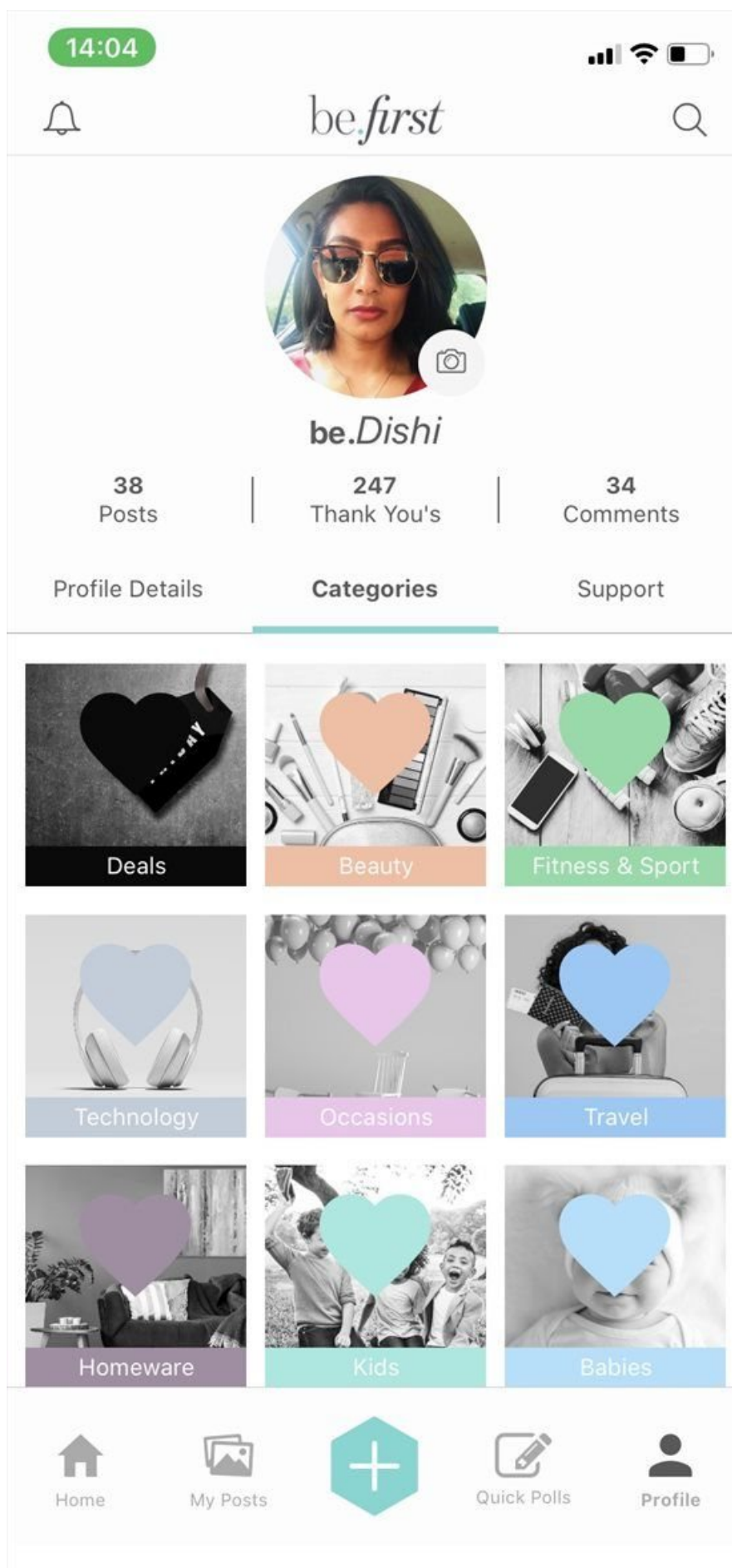
Easier access to funding.

■ ***What do you believe are the traits an entrepreneur needs in order to succeed?***

Resilience, a love for hard work and self-belief – not to mention a good understanding or willingness to learn about the industry you're in and customers you're attracting.

■ ***Tell us about your biggest struggles as an entrepreneur, as well as some major highlights.***

Monetising and procuring funding for a purpose driven business. All apps start somewhere and your monetisation strategy is usually subscription, sale (of product or data) or advertising based. We chose the harder route of offering a service for free while we scale – it is both the struggle and highlight. Struggle to sustain it during growth and highlight because every day we witness people buying better because of be.first.



Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?

Having the freedom, flexibility and autonomy to create an offering and life you love. Challenging yourself (because the risks are higher) to achieve all that you set out for yourself.

## ▣ **Where would you like to see *be.first* in the next five years?**

There are exciting plans to enhance the *be.first* offering which includes a meaningful way to connect with brands, being rewarded for your contribution and the ability to buy directly from the app.

We'd like to continue to help people buy better, be an app that people open daily, be the preferred search engine for recommendations and launch across the continent.

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