

How Njabulo Sithole went from home baker to thriving Pick n Pay supplier

Njabulo Sithole from KwaZulu-Natal has grown his passion for home baking into a successful confectionary business that supplies nearly 200 Pick n Pay stores.



Source: Njabulo Sithole, Bakers Creationz founder. Source: Supplied

From a venture that started out in his home kitchen, eight years later Sithole's Bakers Creationz business has grown to employ 40 staff and supply the supermarket giant with more than 12,000 snowball products each week.

A dream is born

Sithole loved eating cake so much that, in his late 20s, he started making recipes off the back of flour packets, progressing to trying recipes off the internet which he adjusted to his preferences. "As it turns out, quite a few people liked my preferences and I realised there was a demand," the 43-year-old father of two said. "When we had a family gathering or traditional ceremony, people would say they were not buying cakes from a shop, as mine were better. People asked me where I had bought my cakes."

He quit his job as a marketing manager at the end of 2012 to start Baker Creationz, but the expected funding did not materialise. "In 2014, I gave up my dream of starting in a business facility and started trading from my home kitchen, convinced that my business plan would work out in the end."

Bakers Creationz initially supplied local schools with cakes, muffins and cupcakes, paying schoolchildren commission for selling them. "Orders started pouring in and I was able to move to a larger kitchen later that year. I started saving the funds I was making to buy equipment from other bakeries which were closing down."



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Scaling the business

Sithole converted space at Maphephethe near Inanda Dam. The facility meets the relevant enviro-health, food and manufacturing regulations. “This space has expanded along with the business and we currently occupy 300m². I made sure the space complied with food safety regulations by inviting the Department of Health to visit, and they guided me on what needed to be done.”

His experience in food manufacturing as sales and marketing director was also brought to bear.

In the early days, Sithole had minimal income and said there was a point where he could not even buy bread for his family. “I realised I just needed to keep going and develop products for which there was a market. I started small scale but my vision was always to supply major retailers.”

He delivered his initial products himself, by taxi. “I would jump off at the main gate and carry my crates all the way to the delivery gate of the wholesaler I supplied – who is still a customer today.” His customer list has grown to include Pick n Pay stores in KwaZulu-Natal and the retailer recently started stocking his products in Gauteng. He also supplies various fuel station convenience stores.

“My first employee was a driver, who I hired in 2015 after I missed the same road turn three times after I’d been up baking all night. Sometimes I’d work for three days straight. But I first had to build up a credit record to enable me to approach a bank for a loan for the vehicle.”

In 2016 he joined the Pick n Pay Boost Your Biz programme and not only won, but also gained access to the retail giant. He started supplying Pick n Pay with his range of snowballs – raspberry, chocolate, and vanilla – almost two years ago, and sales have grown by over 400% in the past year. He currently stocks his products in 191 stores across Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, after launching in 57 stores in Durban. Initially, Bakers Creationz supplied Pick n Pay with 3,200 units a week, and today supplies 6,000 units twice a week.

“I expected the pandemic to affect the business badly, and orders initially slowed down. But supermarkets were busy and we eventually peaked our production to twice what it was before lockdown. This encouraged me and I realised I had something special,” he said.

The Bakers Creationz facility was fortunately undamaged during the 2021 riots in the province, and when bread supplies ran out in the area, the company expanded its product range to include hot dog rolls and burger buns, which now form a permanent part of its production.

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Supplier awards

Bakers Creationz won Pick n Pay's [2022 Small Suppliers of the Year Awards](#) (which recognises suppliers for their performance, sales growth or ability to create jobs over the last year) which Sithole said increased his confidence and "helped me to realise the areas I am falling short on, what I am doing right and what I need to improve on. Being part of Pick n Pay's Enterprise and Supplier Development programme means that Pick n Pay is holding my hand and giving me confidence to develop my products."

He says, "My vision and goal for this year are to continue expanding to all other Pick n Pay regions, and to extend and increase product lines. I've got a couple of ideas for cakes, especially for Pick n Pay. We just need to finalise packaging and the practicality of shipping, as the product needs to arrive at your customer in excellent condition."

When asked if he enjoys his cake for his birthday, he says he has never had one on his special day – despite being surrounded by cake. "Nurturing a growing business is hard work and I have even had to work on my birthday. I am hoping to be able to build the business to a point where I can take time off and celebrate properly," says Sithole.

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