

# Changing the face of wireless power solutions

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WiPo Wireless Power, a young dynamic startup that provides wireless power solutions for drone and other industrial equipment, was selected as one of the startups to take part in the #Africa4Future initiative.



Dr Jaco du Preez, founder and CEO of WiPo Wireless Power

#Africa4Future is an initiative between Airbus BizLab and the GIZ's (the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) Make-IT in Africa. The programme is being implemented by Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology (MEST) and InnoCircle to drive innovation, build businesses and unlock new potential. InnoCircle, a boutique South African innovation consultancy, selected WiPo to participate in the acceleration programme.

One of the most common goals of acceleration programmes, such as #Africa4Future, is business sustainability. As this results in job creation, it can enhance a community's entrepreneurial climate and economy, retain businesses in a community, build or accelerate growth in local industries and diversify local economies.

As the Cape Town leg of the #Africa4Future programme wrapped up earlier this week, we chat to Dr Jaco du Preez, founder and CEO of WiPo Wireless Power, to find out more about the journey...

❏ ***Can you tell us a bit about WiPo Wireless Power?***

WiPo Wireless Power is a young dynamic startup that provides wireless power solutions for drone and other industrial equipment. The WiPort drone port is a safe and secure enclosure for drones that allows drones to rapidly launch, automatically charge the drone batteries, whilst enabling the drone to be operated autonomously.

❏ ***When, how and why did you get started?***

As the founder of the company, I always wanted to start a hardware-based company that provided a specific solution that addressed a unique problem.

The main drive was looking into two vertical technologies and combine them to provide that solution. In WiPo Wireless Power's case, the two main technologies are Wireless Power and Drones.

The company was subsequently founded in 2017, after winning a Gauteng Accelerator Programme (GAP) Competition prize from The Innovation Hub in 2016. The initial prototype was a charger for drones that could be powered directly from electromagnetic fields from power line. This, however, did not materialise as the local power utility was concerned about drones flying too close to the power lines. WiPo Wireless Power then pivoted the product to a different drone powering solution, the WiPort.

❏ ***What is the core function of WiPo Wireless Power?***

WiPo Wireless Power brings all the benefits of using wireless power to address a unique problem our customers have. We specialise in providing ultra-high powered solutions for a drone, electric forklifts and factory robotics.

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

When the company started we used the lean startup methodology where we still had to validate our business model and the associated hypotheses. One of the hypothesis was a unique product for power utilities on powering drones from power lines, we had to pivot both on product and customer.

❏ ***What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?***

I think the most difficult part of being an entrepreneur is to just start. Start by identifying a unique problem, find out if the problem is widespread and what solutions are available to solve that specific problem. Once the problem is identified start working on a solution that addresses that problem. If the market is significant then there is a great deal of potential for the company. The biggest point here is to just start.

❏ ***What has been your proudest achievements thus far?***

Being selected to be part of the #Africa4Future acceleration programme from hundreds of applicants. the programme run by the MakeIT alliance (Airbus, GIZ, Innocerle and MEST) added so much value to our startup from the expertise, the mentoring, the access to market and insights into VC funding made this experience start out above everything else in the short life of our startup.

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

I believe that with all the support and programmes offered to entrepreneurs and the startup ecosystem developing, entrepreneurs will start younger starting their companies. The median age for entrepreneurs is 38-40 years old and I believe that the median age will move closer to the early 30's for startup founders. They will have access to capital, a better ecosystem and a large pool of free and open source tools to assist them in starting their ventures.

❏ ***What is the importance of startup accelerator/incubator programmes?***

A significant number of entrepreneurs start their companies because of a personal need - either to solve a problem and for necessity. They generally have little to no experience in business or what is required to grow their businesses. this is where these programmes come into the ecosystem. The incubation and acceleration programmes provide startups with mentorship, expertise, co-working space, training, and sometimes funds to assist them in their startup venture.

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

I think the biggest value would be to provide startups access to market, i.e. access to repeatable business from multiple clients. There is nothing better than validating a business model than a paying client. When a startup has repeatable business from multiple clients, they need a great deal less training, mentorship, expertise and most importantly, access to funding from grants or from equity funding.

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

The ability to spot a problem, come up with a solution, determine if there is a gap in the market and most importantly to just start with their venture by building a product that will solve a unique problem.

🔺 ***Tell us about your biggest struggles as entrepreneurs, as well as some major highlights.***

Cash flow is the Achilles heel of any company, especially a startup. With no cash flow in your startup, you cannot pay suppliers, pay salaries and struggle to plan for the future. The saying "Cash is King" is spot on.

To be able to be passionate about what you do, how the company addresses a specific problem and all the excitement that goes with running a startup.

🔺 ***Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?***

As a startup founder, you determine your future. You can work on the one thing that you are most passionate about and not what someone else tells you and pays you to do. I have seen too many people starting a company and fall into another speciality that one never anticipated or are even passionate about. Life is too short to work on something else someone else decided on.

🔺 ***What is the importance of entrepreneurship?***

Entrepreneurs are by far the biggest employer of staff in the economy. If we have one million startups or SMEs, and each of them employs just one more employee, we would eliminate unemployment in a short period of time. Government and large industry cannot do the same, so the future lies with the entrepreneur and not with industry.

🔺 ***Where would you like to see WiPo Wireless Power in the next 5 years?***

A prosperous company employing a number of people, producing a large number of products that are best suited for businesses with specific problems. I would love to see WiPo Wireless Power as a company that stands out in the wireless power community, and people that benefit daily whilst using our products.

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