

Local students start up Collars4Africa

By  Evan-Lee Courie

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What better way to learn than by actual hard experience? Every year, UCT's postgraduate management students who specialise in entrepreneurship are required to start a profitable business.

Six determined students (Sisipho Graham, Alexia Abramson, Godfrey Ramaboea, Matthew Wicht, Sean Young and Anver Victor) who met through the well-known course at the University of Cape Town founded Collars4Africa and in June 2020 launched with a range of bespoke, handmade genuine leather collars.

Sisipho Graham, co-founder of Collars4Africa, shares more about the sustainable business that aims to stimulate micro-economic growth and help to provide work and jobs for local communities in Cape Town.

■ **When and how was the brand born?**

Collars4Africa was founded by a group of students who signed up to do the Postgraduate Diploma in Entrepreneurship at the University of Cape Town this year. We brainstormed many ideas, but all fell in love with premium pet accessories with the aim of sourcing inputs from local suppliers.

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Celebrating the start of spring with golden paws, warm weather and beautiful puppy smiles!💎💎 A little behind the scenes action with our best feature on our collars, "The Golden African Paw" 💎💎 Tell us what you like the most about our collars, we'd love your feedback ☐ Sign up to our newsletter to stay updated with

Collars4Africa this Spring! We've got some exciting news to share with you 💎💎

Edited by: @_.vexed.v Song: Leave my home by @frenchkiwijuice

#collars4africa #proudlysouthafrican💎💎💎 #ad #sponsored #gift #puppylove

#hellospring #supportlocal

A post shared by Collars for Africa (@collars4africa) on Sep 11, 2020 at 1:24am PDT

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📊 **How did you come up with the name?**

We played around with quite a few names: AfriCollar, InjaAfrica, PawfectPets, and then we decided on Collars4Africa because it was simple and spoke to exactly what our identity was as a business is. We are a proudly South African startup that aims to embody what it means to live by the Ubuntu spirit.

📊 **What's your vision for the brand?**

Our vision at Collars4Africa is to create a better life for proud pet families throughout Southern Africa by offering innovative and locally inspired premium pet accessories.

“ We developed our vision over a couple of months to ensure that we came up with a statement that resonated with each founder but more importantly with Collar4Africa's identity ”

We are focused on building a community where animal lovers and proud South Africans may come together to support local businesses.



📊 **Tell us about your product offering.**

We are currently focused on dog collars. Our first collection is called “The Genesis Range” which is named after the course, in which we all met. The collar is made from genuine vegetable tan leather which is highly durable and ages well. The collars are embossed with one of our 3 designs: Proteas, Table Mountain and Ndebele and are a tribute to some of the beautiful aspects of the South African culture and landscape.

Our second and most recent collection is called the "African Beaded Range". These colourful leather collars are available in a variety of designs and are handmade with glass beads.

■ **Are the products locally manufactured/produced in South Africa? What has your experience been like?**

They are! This something that we were adamant about before we had even designed our first product.

“ We wanted to ensure that our business would provide some sort of stimulation for our microeconomy. ”

The Covid situation made starting a business very challenging at times, but we had been in contact with a variety of local suppliers who were interested in developing a long lasting, mutually beneficial relationship with us. Our current supplier is incredible and is devoted to growing together and supporting each other, we have been very grateful for her dedication to our startup.



■ **What other products will be manufactured locally?**

In line with our vision, we strive to have all of our products locally made. We aim to support local businesses and establish mutual relationships with them. #supportlocal #localislekker

■ **Do you have any new products lined up?**

As mentioned earlier us being a startup comes with its challenges but yes, we have many ideas in the works and are always on the lookout for exciting opportunities. Two main areas we have been interested in is leads and harnesses which are still in very early stages of development but have been on our minds.

■ **How long have your products been in the market?**

We officially launched our website, <https://collars4africa.co.za/> on the 20 July 2020.

■ **What are some challenges of getting your products out there?**

Well, as a startup with limited capital I think we have done alright. We have been in contact with a couple of pet orientated retailers and boutiques in the Cape Town area who have shown interest. We are in the process of finalizing our agreements with them, however due to the social distancing regulations it has been difficult for us to really engage with consumers, especially in the developmental phase. We had to conduct focus groups and customer feedback sessions over Zoom which was quite challenging. However, we understand that adaptability and innovation is a part of the entrepreneurship game and we are to continue facing it head on.



📌 **How can consumers get their hands on your products?**

Customers can view and purchase our products on our [website](#). We deliver nationwide and customers can sign up to our monthly newsletters for product specials and announcements.

We also have social media accounts on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), where we share engaging content and have established a wonderful community of animal lovers. We welcome our customers to the Collars4Africa “Woof Pack”, by following us on social media or signing up to our monthly newsletters.

We encourage our customers to share pictures of their pets in our collars via social media, or to email us with any feedback. It is important for us to use our platform to build a community of pet families.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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