

How Bathu founder Theo Baloyi successfully created an authentic African sneaker brand

By Imran Saie

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The idea of Bathu shoes came to Theo Baloyi in 2015 when he realised that Africa had no sneaker brand that authentically tells the African story. Baloyi launched 100 pairs of shoes shortly thereafter to the people in Alexandra, Soweto, Midrand and Thembisa. Since then, Bathu has opened many stores across South Africa. This quick meteoric rise in success is due to Baloyi conceptualising, designing, researching, producing, and doing quality assurance on his products and business.



Bathu CEO Theo Baloyi | image supplied

In the present day, Baloyi's innovation and hard work continue to pay off. He recently placed first in the [Top Footwear Brand](#) category at the Top 16 Youth-Owned Brand Awards and was named the [All Africa Young Business Leader](#) of the Year at the recent All Africa Business Leaders Awards.

I reached out to Baloyi to find out more about himself, Bathu, and the challenges he's faced in starting up his business.

🎖️ ***Congratulations on recently winning the All Africa Young Business Leader of the Year award. How do you feel about it and what does the accolade mean to you and your business?***

Thank you very much. Winning this award reminds me of how we had a vision to build a premium sneaker brand that Africans can affiliate with, realising that unfold by reigniting hope and creating sustainable jobs is a true testimony of the vision and mission we created back then.

This award also solidifies our ability to build and grow brands that embody our heritage and who we are, which we can advocate to the world.

🎖️ ***What inspired you as a young man to start Bathu shoes and build it into a reputable brand?***

A whole lot of things inspired me, starting with my upbringing, and the community I grew up in, but mostly what keeps

inspiring me is the power of unity that I have seen through Bathu, through the clients that continue to support us and the people that truly advocate for our brand.

🔴 ***What are the secrets to your success?***

Humility, passion for people and sheer determination to be always being of service to others. Having an open and teachable spirit keeps me grounded at all times.



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🔴 ***What challenges and risks have you faced in starting Bathu shoes?***

The biggest challenge that I faced was consumer behaviour, five years ago the consumer behaviour trend in South Africa was different in such a way that we were invested in international brands as people deemed them to be more reputable and of greater quality than local.

Trying to come up with an approach that would bring a product shift to consumer behaviour by making them believe that local is lekker in terms of quality and affordability was one of the risks we took.

🔴 ***How has the business grown since its inception?***

The business has grown immensely from when it started, in a back room in Alex, looking at how we have positively impacted a lot of lives. The growth of the business has grown beyond what I ever imagined it could be.

🔴 ***What other successes have you had so far throughout your career?***

Our successes vary, some are add-ons and build-ons, which are solely related and connected to the brand Bathu. We try not to live in a trophy room but we acknowledge and appreciate all our successes and wins.



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🔴 ***Why is entrepreneurship important for South African youth and motivate why a young person should venture into this field.***

I really believe that the paradigm shift in our continent is going to be heavily driven by youth entrepreneurship because it's the way to go in moving our continent forward while ensuring that we bridge the unemployment gap by leveraging off the different sectors of entrepreneurship.

Young people also need to be very intentional about the direction that they want to take and not just focus on microwave success because someone else is doing it. One needs to satisfy their inner core and purpose when venturing into business and not just do it for overnight success.

🔴 ***What four important entrepreneurial lessons do you have for young people that want to start their own businesses?***

1. Forget about microwave success

2. Be purpose-driven
3. Forget about social currency, the right people will come on board to support you
4. Remember time is always the answer to everything such as pain, hurt, success and achievements always give it time

ABOUT IMRAN SALIE

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