



reaming and scheming all in a day's work

TEXT BY LESLEY BOTHA

What do you get when you cross IT with a mobile phone? To find out read on...

Sounds like something technical right? Well we went in search. Johan De Villiers is the man we found and the one behind Enterprise Connection Cape Town, which has taken IT solutions and mobility to a different level altogether. Combining IT and cellphones is no easy task but is all in a day's work for Johan.

"Growing up both of my parents came from an academic background. My father was dean of biochemistry at the University of Stellenbosch and my mother was a teacher by profession. Although the family travelled extensively through the USA and Europe, we spent most of our time in Stellenbosch. It was only natural that I should follow suit. You remember those career aptitude tests the schools and varsities did on you? Well my career assessment options were A) become a lawyer; B) go into marketing or advertising or C) business and computers. Looking at where I have ended up as director of a national IT company with the portfolio of marketing included in the mix, two out of three isn't bad. Plus, I hated Latin, so the legal profession was out by default." says Johan of his early years.

Fortunately, Johan's boyhood fascination with computers meant that his career aptitude results fit in snugly with his passions. "I am logical by nature and programming appealed to me." Of his first taste of working professionally in the IT industry Johan recalls, "I approached ICL but the only position available was in sales and since I had nothing to lose I went for it. In hindsight this was not a bad move at all as it has set me up for where I am going now." Johan's tale doesn't end there though; a year later, a major IBM dealer based in Cape Town headhunted Johan - he's never looked back.

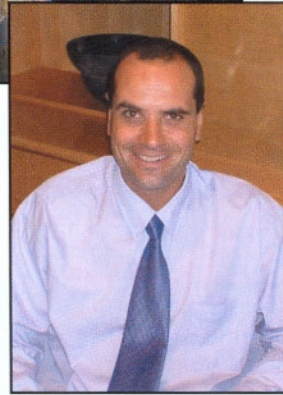


On starting out for Enterprise Connection Johan is pragmatic in answering, "Having been in the corporate IT industry for the past 16 years, I have observed many different business models in terms of the mix of offering value versus volume. When I was presented with the opportunity of starting a new corporate office for Enterprise Connection in Cape Town, I didn't hesitate to implement the strategies and tactics I knew would work in the region. In addition to that, we decided right from the onset that "moving tin" or "selling boxes" would not form part of our core value offering. We have always and will continue to, provide full solutions to our customer base and leave the box moving to the competitors. My years at Dimension Data also taught me a lesson of the importance of looking after the most valued resource in your company, your people. You can either do this or risk losing both them and your customers. To this day I surround myself with people that are highly skilled, customer centric, but most importantly, people who are ethical in their business dealings."

With the late onset of the IT boom in South Africa, it is not hard to come across shady fly-by-nighters. The general perception is that computers are these obsolete high tech gods to which we bow. Certainly, it is a field deep in technicality and technology but there is no reason you should be excluded from this. Enterprise Connection, in addition to being a truly black empowered IT company, has identified three unique business solutions that set them apart from their main competitors. These are Mobility, Finance Rental and License management. It would appear that none of the competitors in this field offer a remotely similar value offering. Johan states, "We tend to



identify business needs before taking a solution to market. This allows us to differentiate ourselves from the typical IT box movers and obviously paves the way for a more profitable business model. Having gained credibility as a trusted partner in corporate accounts permits us to pursue the more mundane IT procurement anyway, but first and foremost we leverage our position as a national solution provider in the true sense of the word.”



Those of you who have no idea what that last paragraph meant raise your hands...In layman's terms; Enterprise Connection identifies your corporate needs and supplies solutions tailor made to suit your company (all this in reference to computers and software of course). For those still not grasping the gist umm perhaps you had better just skip ahead.

For leaders of companies wanting to stay on top of the game Johan has one word of wisdom: READ. “I keep abreast by reading, reading and yes more reading. Titles like Fortune, Time, Leadership, Brainstorm, ITWeb, Business Day and SA Millionaire (I smile at this) all contribute to keeping a finger on the pulse. I also strongly advocate empowering people and part of this process is the continued upgrading of their skill set and accreditation through continued training. This can take the form of full time training, seminars or in-house tuition. The same rule applies to executive management in any company. A lot of time should be spent liasing with overseas and local suppliers and most importantly, staying in touch with your customer base to assess their ever-changing business environments. This is our policy at Enterprise Connection and it is applicable on all levels.”

So, is IT the way to go for youngsters wanting a secure job and steady pay cheque? “Having studied Wolfgang Grulke's 'Lessons for the Future', it is clear that the old model of starting young at a company and retiring 40 years later with a gold watch and pension in the bank is long gone. Job security is something of the past and as such, I strongly believe that

more and more people will leave the typical corporate career and start looking for a more balanced & flexible approached to life. Inevitably, this means becoming their own boss and starting a small business or SME. IT is one of the broader avenues of this but it is not for everyone. Upon setting off on this route, you have to firstly decide what you are passionate about. Identify the market you want to address and get to grips with the existing players in that space. Identify a weakness or opportunity within that segment and decide on a strategy. From there, firm it up into a workable business model. Decide on the best route of funding your new business, e.g. self-funding, private equity, venture capital or perhaps the dti or IDC route. Ensure that you have the financial knowledge required to run a

company, including government incentives for SMME's and rebate programs. Also, do not run foul of elements such as labour law and empowerment issues. Without understanding the importance of your working capital like stock, debtors and cash flow, even the most compelling model will go out of business. Networking is also vital; it is useless to be the “best kept secret” in the industry. Marketing yourself and your company with a passion is a never-ending exercise. Surround yourself with ethical, skilled employees and most importantly, ensure that you have trusted professionals advising you. If you can get all these steps right, you are already halfway on your path to success.

The IT sector involves technology and solutions that change every minute of every day and staying on top of that has to be a daunting task not attempted by the faint hearted. Surprisingly though, Johan finds this stimulating and even his hobbies smack of adversity, challenge and adventure. I'm starting to see a pattern. Johan concludes, “Having just completed climbing Kilimanjaro and qualifying for the semi-finals of the Ecochallenge, I balance my corporate career with an outdoor lifestyle that involves hiking, 4x4' ing, mountain biking and camping. In addition to that, I am also a contributor to a number of publications. I am always on the go and find that my outdoor hobbies relax me. Life is full of a series of challenges both on and off the corporate field and conquering both is what is important to me. You go out there, do your very best and with a little luck and a lot of hard work the fruits of your labour will be all the sweeter for it.” Oh and the answer: a mobility solution that you can operate via your mobile phone when away from the office. To those with the blank stares - Enterprise Connection will keep you in touch.