

# TOWNSHIP TALES

Starting up any kind of business has its challenges, right? Right... but there's an additional challenge of credibility for those operating in townships

## KABELO KALE (36)

MD: KEYS COMMUNICATIONS

**K**ale's company helps improve the image of township surroundings by providing visually appealing wall murals, which often carry a message to the people living in the area. Keys Communications also provides both aesthetic and financial assistance to the community.

**Q** What's your educational background? I obtained a Bachelor of Social Sciences in public management and industrial sociology from the University of Cape Town. I also hold a Post-graduate Diploma in Marketing, a Higher Diploma in Integrated Marketing Communications and a Diploma in Media.

**Q** What did you do before starting Keys Communications?

I worked for both local and multinational companies. I honed my consumer behaviour and strategic planning skills at HerdBooys, the advertising and marketing specialists. I've also worked for Kellogg's SA as Senior Brand Manager and had the privilege of assuming senior marketing roles at companies such as Dulux, McCain Foods and KVV. So I've served my time and paid my dues.

**Q** When did you realise there was an entrepreneur in you?

I grew up around many informal businesses. My dad was from Zimbabwe and came to SA to sell his wares, which included crafts. He was also a barber of note. We had visitors almost every week from Zimbabwe who sold the same wares and I learnt a lot from all of them. My mother ran an informal alcohol business at our Hillbrow flat, which taught me a lot about consumer behaviour and cash and credit management in its rawest form. After those early informative years, I could never be comfortable as an employee. I was born and bred to be an entrepreneur.

**Q** What challenges did you face when you started Keys Communications? There were numerous ones, including being refused financial assistance by commercial banks. To get the business started, we had to come up with extraordinary ways of raising capital, which involved getting rid of all extraneous indulgences and refraining from all luxuries. So we limited our expenses to basics such as shelter, children's education and transport. It was also an overwhelming challenge introducing township wall media

into mainstream outdoor, which was suffering a reduction in spend at the time. Basically, we were going into a declining market, where perceptions of the product we were offering were negative. Managers believed our type of wall media wasn't good for their brands, as it was "too township and dirty". That's how high-definition airbrushing was born, one of the exclusive products and tools we employ to achieve what we now call "township billboards".

**Q** What crucial financial decisions did you have to make to get where you are? Since we had to raise start-up capital ourselves, we were forced to adjust our lifestyles a great deal. We even borrowed a car from

a family member and made many sacrifices to ensure the venture would be a success. During this time we accounted for every cent spent, while working extremely hard so that we wouldn't have to live like that for too long.

**Q** What kind of relationship does your business have with the community? Our business operation is based on the asset-based community development model and seeks to use existing township structures, people and knowledge to benefit our clients and the communities where we operate. This makes our impact multi-fold, as these murals also provide

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aesthetic value to the township in the form of our high-definition airbrushing. But the most important benefit to the community is the rental we pay to landlords, including child-headed households and retired grannies. These people get to realise their dreams of living a better life, which in turn creates positive associations with advertising brands and products. Additionally, we provide the opportunity for local artists to gain exposure through using their skills on the murals.

**Q** What are your ambitions? I won't rest until we have a pool of young men and women in the townships who look around and find inspiration in what we do. My wife and I have personally experienced the ups and downs of township life, when we tried to find solutions and live beyond our circumstances. Although the environment can be difficult, it's also teeming with inspiration for those who can see beyond the way townships are perceived.

