

Today's design students, tomorrow's design entrepreneurs

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

23 Jun 2016

With the country's unemployment rate having jumped from 24.5% to 26.7% in the first quarter of 2016 alone, there's never been a better time to nurture the youth's entrepreneurial spirit. Here's how two design students have already started their entrepreneurial journeys.

Imagine finishing your studies with all the book learning and motivation to enter the job market, only to be turned down again and again as you simply don't have the experience required. It's a harsh reality currently experienced by 8.9 million South Africans. They want to work and are able to work, but simply can't find employment – especially by the ever-growing youth sector of the population.



One way to pre-empt this situation altogether is to start your own business – but that's easier said than done, especially while still studying. 'Easier said than done' doesn't mean impossible though, as proved by Sabelo Sibisi and Tayla Kohler. Both are third-year BA graphic design students at the Design School of Southern Africa (DSSA), which is a brand of The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE).

Individually, each has endeavoured to secure their future by starting their own small businesses while studying, based on their passions.

Sibisi has had an artistic ability from a young age and so took it upon himself to make a career out of art, with design the most suitable venture for his artistic abilities. He now operates the trendy street-conscious apparel brand, STRU, targeted at the youth and based on the colloquialism for 'It's true' commonly used in Soweto. "As the term is well understood by the market, it made it easy for them to relate. The message behind the brand is to stay STRU (true) to yourself and your word. The people were immediately able to relate to the message, and therefore associate themselves with it," he explains.

Kohler turned her hobby of custom-making tapers, ear gauges, pendants, miniatures, figurines and interesting necklaces

from non-toxic polymer clay that's baked in an oven into a sustainable enterprise. Once baked, she uses water-based sealant to protect the piece and ensure that colours don't leach from the clay itself over time. She has also always been interested in art, going so far as to say, "It feels like paint runs through my veins, as graphic design is a design form that's ever-changing and reinventing itself, like a phoenix rising from the ashes and being reborn with each new development in technology and opportunities."

Entrepreneurial wildfire

Sibisi says the amount of talent amongst the youth of South Africa accompanied by the unemployment rate gives the initial spark for youth to initiate their business endeavours and take it upon themselves to start and grow their own initiatives. He explains that the idea of starting your own business is a way of thinking that's spreading amongst the minds of the youth like wild fire. That said, note that studying and running a successful business simultaneously comes with a lot of sacrifices, such as less time for social gatherings and a need for increased stamina and creativity in your marketing abilities.



Kohler adds that it's really difficult to start something, especially when you have nothing, because everything costs money. The key then is to believe in your idea so much that your passion and drive can help sell your idea to others and through this you will soon find support. She adds that people want to help, but they also want to know that you're serious about what you want to do.

"Luckily my market is South African students and youth," explains Kohler. As it's difficult to approach people and show them your wares, because they hate to be harassed, she simply got creative and started wearing the jewellery she'd made to the DSSA campus every day. "It definitely got noticed and was a great conversation starter," she says, adding that budding entrepreneurs have to think of unique ways to market themselves and always be keen to discuss their business with people who approach them, because you never know what opportunities may arise.

Kohler says if you have an idea, now's the time in South Africa and the world to run with it and take it further. "Don't think that all great inventions and ideas happened in the past and that you shouldn't try. Make history, right now."

It's all the inspiration you need to fire up your entrepreneurial passion. Go forth and succeed! Follow the Design School of Southern Africa (DSSA) [on Twitter](#) for more.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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