

Opening up the tender process

 By Leigh Andrews

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OpenTenders is a South African business-to-business social network. It's also determined to assist South Africa achieve its 2030 National Development Plan goals and create millions of jobs - not as pie-in-the-sky as it seems...

The government tender process has been problematic for some time, with many a cartoon drawn up about the sometimes covert, often complicated, and definitely not transparent ways and means of operation - up to now. Luckily this is set to change, with Finance Minister Nhlamhla Nene announcing after the recent Budget Speech that Government would implement a compulsory public tender portal from April this year, with all tender documents available for download.

[OpenTenders](#) Co-Founder & COO, Mnive Nhlabathi said he was excited at the prospect of government's e-tender portal, as it "makes our business easier and does not impact on the extra services our portal offers".



The OpenTender team..

If you've not heard of OpenTenders before, you'll be wondering what this six-month old portal offers. At face value, Nhlabathi, along with partners Sivu Maqungo (CEO) and chairman Madoda Khuzwayo, says it gives small businesses an opportunity to connect and trade with each other and expand their business on a global scale. But there's more to it than that. It also offers actual business opportunities in the form of open government and private sector tenders, letting any business easily track available opportunities within all sectors of their interest. There are also instant email notifications of any new opportunities listed on the site, as well as extra services on the portal, like SMME project finance and skills development.

Impressive, but what does it take to launch such a project? For entrepreneurs themselves to decide to help others get their break in the industry? I chatted to the three masterminds behind OpenTenders to find out more...

■ 1. Firstly, tell us about the name *OpenTenders*: How did it come about?

Madoda, Nhlabathi and Maqungo: Well, before this we ran an IT and branding company, and when we looked for procurement in Johannesburg we found it was a very competitive industry; we'd travel as far as Venda for business on a daily basis and clocked up 120,000km in a year in our shared BMW. We also found that government notices of tenders were very erratic and figured there must be an easier way to procure tenders. Based on this we started OpenTenders. At its heart it's a B2B social network that lets you connect to tender opportunities as well as each other. We encourage open

access. And what better way to do so than through social media?

■ **2. Indeed. Next, tell us how 11 million jobs will be created in SA?**

Madoda, Nhlabathi and Maqungo: Government spends roughly R500bn on procurement, we wanted to filter the opportunities to a larger pool of candidates. We feel this is a more effective way of doing it than the traditional method, of simply awarding one big contract to the same players each time - give the smaller guys a chance. That's how you create more jobs, by subcontracting out to others and empowering smaller businesses.

■ **3. That's for sure. Have you had many sign-ups to your B2B social network site?**

Madoda, Nhlabathi and Maqungo: We have roughly 2,100 registered, active users at the moment. At around 60 to 70 new sign-ups per day, that's not bad if you consider we only officially launched in September 2014.

■ **4. Not bad at all! What's the benefit of your downloadable software program?**

Madoda, Nhlabathi and Maqungo: It's not a heavy, outdated textbook or a pricy course - for just R500, our Toolkit Guide teaches all aspects of the basics of business, such as marketing and finance. It's a boon whether you're already in business or looking to get into the market. The program gives you easy-to-understand and -implement advice on everything from selecting a company name to registering the company, opening up a bank account, registering for SARS and UIF, as well as marketing, financing and human resources help. You don't even need to be online the whole time to use this as once it is downloaded and installed, the programme can be used offline whenever you'd like, with automatic updates as and when legislation changes coming through when you do connect to the internet again. It literally pulls updates together for you when you log in, for up to a year.

■ **5. Sounds great. Any final words of wisdom?**

Madoda, Nhlabathi and Maqungo: Yes, we also launched our SME Roadshows recently, incorporating free seminars for corporates and SMEs alike. These cover project management, finance and more - all the aspects small businesses struggle with. The future plan is to open the OpenTenders platform to the rest of Africa as well as adapting the business toolkit to different markets across the continent. We also help you apply for funding online. Plus, we're nicer to deal with than a bank.

They certainly are nicer to deal with than a bank, having kept me chatting long after the time I'd allotted and thinking just how nice it was to 'talk business' with them.

For your own shot to do business with the OpenTenders team, contact them on www.opentenders.com.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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