

The future of beauty retail: A conversation with Mathebe Molise of Beauty on TApp

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7 Sep 2023

In 2015, the birth of Beauty on TApp marked the genesis of a pioneering online beauty emporium owned entirely by women, specialising in top-notch skincare, haircare and self-care products.



Beauty on TApp founder Mathebe Molise (centre)

As its first step, the company launched a mobile application meticulously crafted to seamlessly connect users with local beauty services, including makeup artists, hair braiders, and skin therapists. Additionally, the app featured an exclusive directory that showcased distinctive and niche beauty brands.

Acknowledging the imperative need for sustainable financial growth, a strategic transformation was set into motion, culminating in the establishment of a robust e-commerce platform. This digital evolution revolved around the retail of cosmetics, initially sourced from the very brands previously highlighted in the app's directory.

In this interview, we engage in an insightful conversation with Mathebe Molise, the founder behind Beauty on TApp. We embark on a profound exploration of her journey through the tech industry, shedding light on the profound impact she has orchestrated. At the core of her exceptional achievements lies Beauty on TApp itself - an innovative enterprise seamlessly fusing technology with the realm of beauty services and products.

📌 Congratulations on being recognised as one of TelkomZA's Phenomenal 10 Women in Tech! Can you share more about your journey in the tech industry and the impact you hope to make in the field?

Beauty on TApp has leveraged technology to make the beauty service and product acquisition process easier for customers and our community. The beauty industry has been quite slow to leverage technology however cosmetics are products we use daily and the buying process should be as seamless and as easy as possible and that is what we have done at Beauty on TApp.



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The business has pivoted a number of times and the pivots have all been based on customer feedback. Initially, we had a find a beauty service offering on the app and a find a niche product side however app users gave us feedback that they want to shop products on one platform and pay one shipping fee and that's how our e-commerce platform was born. Since then we've worked to improve our website UX and efficiency and we've made progress thus far.

■ ***How did your business journey transform from a beauty service directory to a flourishing online beauty and wellness e-commerce platform, including the creation of your own skincare line, Pastry Skincare?***

At Beauty on TApp we pride ourselves on constantly engaging with our community and listening to feedback. The online store came about after app users told us they'd like to shop products on our app directory on one platform and Shop Beauty on TApp was then borne.

It took a few iterations to get the shop site right but we eventually got it right. Pastry was also created from feedback received from the Beauty on TApp community. People were looking for body care with active ingredients and after searching in the market for a while we couldn't find anything and decided to launch our own skincare brand that caters for this request.

Our business evolution has largely been based on engaging with our community and working to fulfil gaps we identify in the market.



■ ***Which skills have you carried over from your career as a chartered accountant to your journey as an entrepreneur in the beauty tech industry?***

My background is in banking and I spent eight years at an investment bank. I spent time as a credit analyst then worked as an executive assistant to both the head of Africa and then to the CEO of the bank. The skills I probably use daily are modeling/analytical review skills and financial management/cash flow management and risk management.

But more importantly - I'm very strict about building processes and controls within the business to ensure the business operates without a hiccup and that mistakes are minimised.

I think my last role in banking which was EA to the CEO taught me a lot about leadership and business management and those are very important skills to have.

■ ***Beauty on TApp has been in business for eight years and continues to grow. If you were to offer advice to aspiring entrepreneurs, what would it be?***

Consistency is very important as well as keeping your promise to customers. Whatever you do that requires that you be consistent do it. Whether it's posting daily on social media or keeping your delivery timelines - your promise to customers is important and should be kept. It also takes a lot of sacrifice and discipline (time, financial etc) to build a business so you need to be mentally ready for that as well.

But in the end, the consistency and discipline will hopefully pay off.

■ ***The Beauty on TApp and Pastry skincare brand has undeniably captured the affection of its social media community. How did you go about fostering such a deeply engaged audience?***

Often brands just post but don't actively engage with their followers/community or enjoy it. We absolutely love engaging with all our community and creating content they can engage with.

We understand our markets - The Beauts/Besties and Pastry Dolls - so we use a specific tone to engage with them, use humour when engaging with them and engage using the simplest terms as cosmetic lingo can be intimidating and we want to make sure they fully understand what we're saying.

We also seek to educate more than sell products and create engaging and educational content that our communities enjoy. I think it's also important to sell quality - I think both brands are also appreciated because they both sell top-tier service and quality. Pastry is so well formulated, caters to the local market and is effective so it has won the hearts of some whereas Beauty on TApp stocks quality brands and has what I think is the best customer service.



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■ ***You expanded into physical retail this year with your flagship in-store in Mall of Africa and Pastry skincare products on sale at Egg in Cavendish. As the founder of an online store, what value do you see in physical retail?***

The South African market and most markets are still heavily reliant on brick and mortar. I did some work to understand the e-comm vs brick and mortar sales percentages at international beauty stores and brick and mortar sales far outweigh e-comm. I think when it comes to some shopping experiences touching and feeling products is still important to consumers so the decision to tackle brick-and-mortar was well thought out and seems to have been a good decision.

What has been amazing to see is that brick-and-mortar expansion hasn't impacted online sales which means there was a whole market segment that we were missing that we have now included in our community.



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■ ***What keeps you motivated amidst the inevitable shifts in the business landscape, both in your business pursuits and outside them?***

I want to see Beauty on TApp become the biggest beauty business in Africa and I know it can happen. We have something

special - a great business model with great brands supported by a strong team and community. Seeing the business grow every month despite the economic climate keeps us motivated because when things improve then I believe we've set ourselves up for success.

More than that - I want to inspire young women and show them that anything is possible. We operate in a market with very big cosmetic retailers and beauty brands but we're growing our market share despite the odds. So we're working to change the narrative and demonstrate that inclusivity - both internally and externally is crucial for business growth.

ABOUT NTANDOKAZI NTOZAKHE

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