

Using beauty as a vehicle for economic inclusion

 By Lauren Hartzenberg

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The Covid-19 lockdown has stalled South Africa's dynamic beauty services industry. Due to the high-touch nature of the job, it may be a while until beauty practitioners are able to safely resume trade. However the team behind The Amazi Group, a socially-driven women-owned beauty company, believes the lockdown is an opportune time for businesses to recalibrate their strategies and commit to more conscious ways of operating.



The Amazi Group co-founders. From left: Katleho Tsoku, Lisa Mgcotyelwa and Divya Vasant

Driving economic inclusion

The company was created as a skills development organisation in 2015, founded by Divya Vasant, a financial analyst and investment professional. Two years later Vasant partnered with health and skincare industry expert Lisa Mgcotyelwa and Katleho Tsoku, an entrepreneur and business developer, to morph The Amazi Group into a social enterprise with both an impact arm and a commercial arm.

The Group now comprises Amazi Beauty, a chain of beauty bars offering nail and face treatments, and the Amazi Academy, a non-profit beauty training school with locations in Cape Town and Johannesburg. The goal of the academy is to help facilitate the economic empowerment of marginalised women in South Africa through skills development.

“What makes Amazi different is that its existence is firmly rooted in being on the right side of history. While there is a lot that is uncertain, the task for us right now is not so much about carving out our brand relevance, but rather amplifying it. We need to be unapologetic about being a conscious business because that is certainly what the world needs more of right now,” says Katleho Tsoku.

Level 4: Hardware, food delivery and winter clothing allowed, but no cigarettes

30 Apr 2020





The Amazi Academy, a non-profit entity funded by various impact investors, has trained over 100 nail and beauty technicians, 60 of which remain employed in the Amazi Beauty bars in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Successful applicants to the academy are equipped with theoretical and practical training focused on nail technology, beauty services and soft skills. This training is fully subsidised, and once complete, graduates are either employed at Amazi Beauty bars or may choose to forge their own path in the industry.



Beauty beyond Covid-19

Due to the pandemic, the training school and beauty bars have been shut since 16 March. However, the Amazi Group co-founders say they're in the fortunate position to have funders who believe in the company's mission to create economic opportunity and who are helping keep the organisation afloat while the Amazi team turns its focus towards innovation.

In the meantime, the Group has digitalised its Amazi Academy platform so that they're able to recruit, screen and offer training online.

"The beauty industry is a source of income for thousands of women and we believe that finding a new way for the industry to engage with customers is imperative. Much of this will be to look at how digitalisation features in the experience," the co-founders told *Bizcommunity*.

“We know that customers have begun exploring how to purchase and in general interact more digitally over this time. While we may not know yet the format that a beauty experience can evolve to, we do know that finding ways to meet our customers’ needs will be shaped by conversation and collaboration with not only customers but with beauty professionals and other role players in the industry that are all contemplating their relevance.”



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CEO and founder Divya Vasant concludes, “I want this universal pause to reset to a new normal where small, considerate, humane is more valuable than big, cheap, quick. A new normal where sufficient is better than always needing more. A new normal where SMME’s are not subsidizing the rental of big companies and can trade for the progress of their people.

“A new normal where the innate wisdom of women helps carve a new way to value each other and the resources we share. If there is ever a time to revolt against the systems that make the world more unequal, surely it is now.”

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