

FIRST PERSON ■ MARKETING

Making a business out of training

The business bug has been in me since childhood, having grown up in a commercial household: my mother owned a grocery store and was excellent with figures and operations, while my father was among the first African entrepreneurs to benefit from the Kenya Industrial Estate loans.

My siblings and I worked in both businesses during weekends and school holidays.

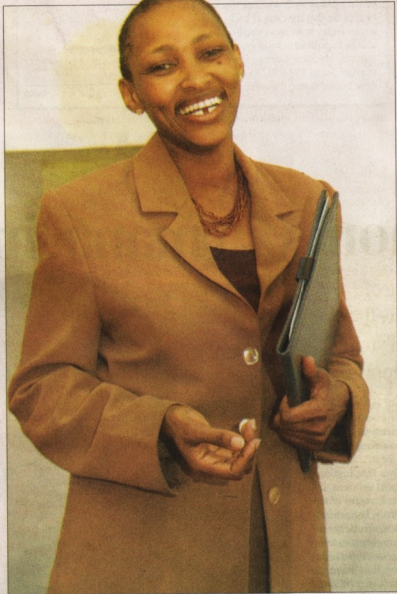
I suppose it is from here that I acquired a commercial mind. Today, I own Marketing Strategies and Solutions, a marketing consultancy and training firm, a journey that has taken me 15 years. We offer marketing communications services as well as design, and implement various training programmes with a focus on selling and customer retention strategies.

My journey began at the age of 24, when I opened my first business straight after campus.

Kiasili Clothing Ltd was a clothes design and production company. We were manufacturing, distributing and later retailing soft furnishings and commercial handicrafts.

After closing down the business in 2000, I had to think fast about how to rebrand my business, since I wanted to go into selling services as opposed to products. Call it luck, but the owners of TACK Training International encouraged me to go into training.

I worked with them as an associate trainer, and my first client was Kenya Airways, where I effectively facilitated customer care and telephone handling skills training to ground and front-office staff in Africa, Middle East and Eu-



rope. It was a wonderful experience and good exposure.

In 2002, Farmer's Choice hired me as a customer services manager, and I was also in charge of customer and supplier relationships for the retail chain stores.

As I trained the chain stores staff, I realised that customer service in this country is poor. Since Kiasili's success was based on service excellence, I thought I could make a difference and impart some of my knowledge hence my company was born.

My aim was to provide marketing services and brand positioning to the small and medium enterprises (SMEs), because after they grow, they stagnate due to lack of knowledge to expand their businesses.

At the same time, I felt the need for a stronger partner in training, who had a local presence with global ties. As I am not afraid to build my brand and grow through appropriate partnerships, Deloitte Consulting became one of my partners in the customer management service line, and this has been

instrumental in positioning my business as an emerging leading marketing and training brand name.

Today I have a mix of clients including blue chip companies like Rwanda Investment and Promotion Agency, Rwandatel s.a, Deloitte, GlaxoSmithKline, Stanbic Investment Management Services and Flooring and Interiors.

A challenge I continually face is that

most companies lack strategies for customer retention, while failing to understand the critical role of customer service on company image regardless of the industry. They also believe that training is an unnecessary expense, but my track record

shows that 80 per cent of the training realise an average return on investment (ROI) of 85 per cent within a span of three to four months.

Another challenge has been converting proposals into clients. It is normally a lengthy process, due to the lack of well documented local business projects in this region that can be used as case studies.

However, despite all these challenges, the triumph of overcoming them, and the satisfaction I get when I see my clients happy, gives me more drive daily.

My dreams and hopes are that in five year's time, my company will have entrenched itself as the most professionally run and value adding marketing consultancy and training brand, with options of franchising within East Africa. — AS TOLD TO MUSANGI NITHOI

My aim is to provide marketing services and brand positioning

VITAL STATISTICS

BUSINESS OWNER: Nyokabi Njuguna
 FIRM: Marketing Strategies and Solutions
 SERVICES: Marketing Consulting & Training Programmes
 EMPLOYEES: Four and database of 50 consultants
 FOUNDED: 2003