IT firm going places

AWARD WINNER: Entrepreneur looks back on lucky break

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ENTREPRENEUR Sanele Gcumisa got his lucky break in business 13 years ago while he was reflecting on the disappointment of not being able to study further to improve his IT skills.

In fact, luck had very little to do with him being offered a scholarship from the U.S. Agency of International Development to study IT at a South African tertiary institution.

Durban-based Gcumisa (32), who was raised in kwaDabela near Pinetown, was a dedicated volunteer in his community and was serious about studying further.

He grabbed the opportunity with both hands and spent the past 13 years establishing himself as an IT entrepreneur.

He now owns Ocule IT.

Illustrating his path to business viability and personal success, Gcumisa recently won an award in the jobs category at the KwaZulu-Natal regional Shanduka Black Umbrellas enterprise development awards.

He told *The Witness* that he had longed to study further and get involved in business, but lacked the financial muscle to do so.

"At the beginning of January 2000, while thinking about what to do with my life, I got a call saying that I had been awarded the scholarship. I was shocked. I did not expect that I would receive anything that would help bring me progress in my life."

Sanele Gcumisa of Ocule IT.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

He now holds a national diploma and BTech in IT from the Durban University of Technology and is completing an MBA with the Management College of Southern Africa.

The journey to achieve a tertiary education and business viability and stability has been a challenging one.

Gcumisa spent his formative years volunteering at various community projects, including RDP housing construction and a telecommunications rollout initiative.

After developing an interest in telecoms and IT, he completed an end-user computing course. The scholarship enabled him to secure a formal IT qualification.

In 2004, he secured an internship with DUT and later worked as an assistant, managing internship programmes in IT.

While working there, he also registered a company in the hope that he would one day enter the world of entrepreneurship.

In 2007, he joined an organisation called Mayivuke (which rolled out various community projects) as a project manager focusing on IT-related internship projects.

Two years later, he established Ocule IT and began working on a broadband rollout project with telecoms consulting company Tel-net-com, while also working on training and internship projects.

"I had planned for entrepreneurship. It was always something I was interested in."

However, in 2011 — in search of greater financial sustainability and security — he took the decision to create a software development division.

The new solution would sell two key offerings: an online assessment system based on Gcumisa's experience and medical records management software.

"I realised that I must have products that I can sell, instead of only selling my services."

He recently linked up with IT solutions company Shanduka Black Umbrellas (SBU) and has benefitted from its strong support structures.

It helped him develop a proper business plan offering him access to key IT equipment and provided expertise in software development. He now has three people who help him with this aspect of the business.

"The next step is to increase my client base. My advice to others is to secure clients early on, preferably before you start. This will help you service your expenses early on."

It is still early days and Gcumisa is unapologetic about the fact that his business is a work in progress.

Judging by his plans for the business and the support he receives from the SBU, Ocule IT is certainly going places.