

This is a short story of my personal experience when I visited three townships in South Africa.



Supplied. The township is a place of thriving entrepreneurship

In 2021 we released our very first Township CX Report. It went well. It wasn't a spectacular success, but it was good enough to motivate us to do it again in 2022. This time around, we wanted it to be bigger and better.

An injection of authenticity

We decided that part of the bigger and better was an injection of authenticity. It's one thing to see some data on a spreadsheet, but it's quite another to go to where the people are. To sit with them, to talk about their experiences, to connect. We chose three townships, Alexandra, Soweto, and Katlehong, and we planned our expedition.

I call it an expedition because, for me, it was. If you can't tell by my profile picture, I'm white. I'm suburban in every sense of the word. A trip to a township is not an everyday occurrence for me. It's a thing. It's an expedition. It's new and alien and daunting. What is every day for most of South Africa, is not every day for me. In many ways, I'm a tourist in my own country. And that's not okay.

2021 was not a great year for South Africa. Covid-19, the riots, and a bunch of other things led me to believe that this country was in dire straits. I didn't hold much hope. I expected our township visits to be depressing. I expected to see economic hardship, strife, and suffering. Sure, some of that was there. But there was also something else.

A masterclass in entrepreneurship

In Soweto we saw spaza shops and restaurants rebranding to their own unique look-and-feel. A shift away from the branded cold-drink signs we've seen so often. No, they had their own brand identities. We saw entrepreneurs coming up with new and innovative ideas, from bespoke food delivery services to unheard of financial services.

If you want to attend a master class in entrepreneurship, downtown Alex is where it's at. In Katlehong we met a man that has managed to connect spaza shops together through his distribution network, all while inventing a cold drink that's just as healthy as it is delicious.

In a way, 2021 was a blazing inferno, burning through the lives of South Africans, leaving ruin in its wake. But entrepreneurship and innovation were birthed in that fire, and they rose like the proverbial phoenix, carrying the township economy upward with it.



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Look up

My township encounter was eye-opening. On the plane back to Cape Town, I was smiling. My hope for South Africa was renewed, my love rekindled.

Digital marketers need to look up from Facebook Insights and Google Analytics every now and then. We need to exercise some empathy and understanding. We need to go out and see what's going on. Don't be afraid, step out of your comfort zone. This white boy did and he was pleasantly surprised.

ABOUT CRAIG HANNABUS

Craig is the strategy director at Rogerwilco. His most recent career history, which spans more than 15 years, is dominated by digital - before that he worked in logistics.

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