

Ozone does it all - from email hosting to product distribution



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Ozone Information Technology Distribution is a channel technology company. But what makes the company stand out is the women - it's an IT company populated by women.



Henk Olivier, managing director of Ozone Information Technology Distribution

We chat to Henk Olivier, managing director of Ozone Information Technology Distribution, about how he built a company that recognises the value that women bring to the IT table and continues to focus on women as it grows and expands.

■ ***Tell us a bit about Ozone Information Technology Distribution***

Ozone Information Technology Distribution is a vibrant IT solutions company situated in Johannesburg, South Africa. It's a company that is passionate about matching the best possible solutions to client requirements, solving problems and easing business challenges with smart and effective technology.

The company hosts an award-winning array of products that are distributed across South Africa and Africa with 219 resellers in SA, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania and more. We provide people with support, training and in-depth knowledge and guidance so their organisations can thrive.

■ **When, how and why did you get started?**

We started about ten years ago as a website and email hosting company. We were also the reseller of a firewall product and the vendor asked us if we were interested in becoming the primary distributor of this product in South Africa as we did the most sales. So, we became their distributor! Now, 90% of our revenue comes from distribution and the rest of our revenue comes from our hosting services.

■ **Ozone is a company populated by women. How did this come about and what value does it add?**

It may sound like a cliché but the fact that women are more caring really does reflect in the company culture. When the workplace is dominated by women then it becomes a more personal and engaging environment that inspires people to work together.

Thanks to the fact women are brilliant at communicating, they also tend to be more productive and better at collaborating with one another. Systems and processes are more efficient as a result. The ability to work with people across all levels of the company makes it far easier to streamline processes and make people feel as if they are a part of something important, not just showing up for another day in the office. These are also the reasons why Ozone has so many women and female leaders – it makes sense.



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■ **What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?**

One of our biggest challenges was to convince the resellers that we were now the distributor. They were so used to buying directly from the vendor. This did impact the price for the partners a bit and it took about six months for systems to fall into place and settle down.

Another challenge, that's ongoing, is the exchange rate and its impact on currencies. This can affect sales at certain times of the year but you do start learning the seasons of currencies in Africa and managing them better. We also had to overcome the challenge of withholding taxes – a regulation that some African countries have.

■ **What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?**

“ You really do need to know your market and your clients. Never assume anything, especially when it comes to delivering products to your clients. You may think you know what your market and client want, but it is better to do your research and make sure you really do know what they want. Research is also critical when it comes to competitor products and solutions as you must ensure you stay ahead of the curve when it comes to client servicing. ”

■ **What has been your proudest achievement thus far?**

We received an award from one of our vendors for achieving the highest growth in an emerging partner.

■ **What does the future of entrepreneurship look like to you?**

The future for the entrepreneur has never looked more promising. You don't need much capital to start a business and there are so many technology solutions at lower prices that can help you achieve your goals and manage your systems more effectively. But it does make the risk of failure higher – there is a lot more competition...

■ **What is the importance of start-up accelerator/incubator programmes?**

One of the key elements of these programmes needs to be guidance and mentoring. For entrepreneurs looking at a programme, they need to do their research to ensure they get value out of the relationship. Also, it is critical that you're 100% aware of what your responsibilities and deliverables are before you enter into the relationship.



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■ **What would you like to see changed in the South African startup landscape?**

I would like to see more initiative around sustainability when it comes to our natural resources, like food, water etc. Even electricity. Going forward these are going to become the hottest topics of conversation in our country, on the professional and the personal level.

■ **What do you believe are the traits an entrepreneur needs in order to succeed?**

A stubborn refusal to give up. And a willingness to learn from failure because there will be failure. However, if you are open to it, you can learn a lot from failure and from things that didn't go as planned.

■ **Tell us about your biggest struggles as entrepreneurs, as well as some major highlights.**

The biggest struggle for all entrepreneurs at the start is cash flow. To add to the stress as you grow, you gain employees and you are responsible for them. Another big thing as you grow is if you don't have documented procedures in place - it really makes the business very unproductive because people do their own things and there aren't standards for people to adhere to. This is especially difficult if you have a few people in one division, but everyone delivers a different standard of work or has a completely different approach to how they do things.

■ **Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?**

The life of an entrepreneur is for anyone who wants to have more from life than just waking up in the morning, going to work and then going home. If you have a vision and a dream to chase, then you must go for it.

■ **What is the importance of entrepreneurship - especially in a country such as South Africa?**

One must really do your homework before you start. Don't think that there is a market for a product or a service – do your research so you know there is a market for your product or service. With the fast changing world of technology, you can have a product today, but it can be replaced by tomorrow with something much better.

■ **Where would you like to see Ozone Information Technology Distribution in the next 5 years?**

Our vision for Ozone is to have multiple products and vendors and to provide our partners a one-stop shop for IT security solutions and networking tools.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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